Rajouri Remembered

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In loving memory

of my late wife

Smt. Kailash Saraf

Translator and Editor's Note

Growing up in Delhi, Rajouri was a word I associated with the label of the DTU and DTC buses which plied so regularly at one time on the city roads. Rajouri Garden was and still is, a middle class residential colony of West Delhi. When Kanti said he was from Rajouri, that's where I assumed he lived. Till he clarified that it was in J&K, near Poonch. It was 1975 and I had just joined college, but the war of 1971 had left "Poonch sector" in some corner of my memory, and that helped to locate Rajouri in my mind. In the years of our courtship I met several of Kanti's relatives in Delhi. They were all people displaced during the turmoil of 1947. Rajouri was frequently mentioned in many of our conversations, but mostly in the context of its culinary delights, particularly, its delicious local cheese called *kaladi*. In impalpable ways however, I could sense that for them, Rajouri was always the reference point for judging the present conditions of existence, a place always present in its absence. I was also intrigued by the fragmentary nature of real information about Rajouri given out by them, a certain reluctance, unease, and paradoxically, even silence, around the subject of Rajouri. In other words, I did not have 'the story'. Shri Baijnath Shivpuri – dearly beloved Baij Mamaji, now no more, was the first one to refer to 'the rape of Rajouri', but soon passed on to talking

about other things. I could never get over the hesitation of asking him or anyone else what that meant, for fear of probing further into some heavily guarded private area which everyone seemed to carry within. That is how I saw it then. I knew that Kanti's close relatives had been killed in the Rajouri riots. Many acres of land had been lost and that his parents had brought up nine children, excluding the three sons born to them. There were other relatives still living in Rajouri. To me, at that time they were inconsequential.

Kanti and I got married on 11 November 1982. The irony of the date strikes me now as I write this account. It is also the time of the fall of Rajouri. The first real fragments of the story of Rajouri came my way after our marriage, piece by piece, painfully surfacing in snatches of conversation or chance introductions to relatives who were associated with the experience of 1947. I remember in 1987, when I had wanted to light up the new house my in-laws had built in Jammu on Diwali, my mother–in–law resisted saying that all our elders had been killed in Rajouri on that day, the Diwali of 1947. We lit up regardless and determined to choose the surge of life and its promised blessings, in the new home that was ours and the children who were the new additions to the family, and in that act put an end to the decades of mourning.

In the October of 1987, I accompanied my mother-in law along with my two daughters to Rajouri. My father-in law was already there and was at the bus station to receive us. Even as I got off the bus holding my infant daughter in my arms, I heard him saying - *is zameen ko choom lo yeh mera watan hai!* It's been almost twenty years, but I remember clearly the note of pride and possession in his voice, and the look of joy on his face as he welcomed us, his own people on his own land. We were there to attend a wedding and I was a daughter-in-law of one of the 'first families' of Rajouri. People in the town were eager to host us for a meal. The visit was to be short, so it had to be breakfast, or lunch or tea or dinner, whichever suited us. But my father-in-law made excuses and instead took me all over the town, pointing out all the places he held dear and gradually, in a matter of fact way, gave me glimpses into his Rajouri and his life. I began to ask questions, sometimes intrusive ones, began to probe and began to piece together a story.

My late mother-in-law would often remark that were she a skilful writer, she would write a novel on her life. I would then offer to write it for her, if she would tell me her story. I began to prod her and many details emerged during my annual visits to Jammu to be with the family. Even our familiarity and relationship however,

did not give me the privilege to breach the areas of silence which we skirted. And I did not persist. But soon I seemed to be the one in the family to have the kinship network figured out, the names in place. In jest I would tell my father-in-law to collect information and material on Rajouri for the 'story' waiting to be told. He said he already had a lot in the big steel almirah which he always kept under lock and key. There were photographs too. At that time I did not go further.

On 25 November 2006, my mother-in-law suddenly passed away. Everyone was overwhelmed by the turn of events. So it was with Daddy at 79, broken-hearted, tears overflowing in his pained eyes, lamenting in a broken voice the loss of his companion, his wife - another loss, of which there would be no record, no memory. The mourners who came from all over and especially Rajouri, refreshed his longings for his native land and sharpened his sense of loss, till I found that the loss of his wife was beginning to merge with the loss of his *watan*. For Shri Amar Nath Saraf, as for many of his contemporaries in North India, life still has only one milestone- *Shorish*. Life is cleanly sliced into two parts – *shorish se pehle , shorish ke baad. Shorish* does not mean riots or the Partition. *Shorish* is a word which is comprehensive and resonates with meanings which are derivatives of the event of the Partition.-

chaos, anguish, dislocation, separation, and of course, the violence, the massacres, the brutality of the riots. *Shorish...*

Soon after Mummy's death, as Daddy cleared up his papers in private, he handed me the material he had collected over the years and told me to put it together as a dedication to the memory of Mummy. He began to read me the material in Urdu which I simultaneously translated and wrote down. There was his oral narrative which I recorded faithfully. There were memories of what Mummy had related, fragments which I began to put together. I went a little further. I told Daddy to write down his experiences of Rajouri, the ones he remembered. He was grieving for Mummy and I felt that this would occupy him and allow him the space to move from one memory to another. Perhaps such an activity would be cathartic. He took a month to write and the clarity of his recollection was remarkable. He wanted a Hindi and an English version. The task before me as a translator and an editor was problematised by the fact that I was also a receiver of many strands of the story from a variety of sources which included relatives and friends. As a member of the family, I was privy to a lot of confidences. As a daughter-in-law, much was undoubtedly withheld from me, or reworked in the telling. Besides, I too had my views on Rajouri, and its signifi-

cance for the Sarafs. What would be the place and role of all this in the story of Shri Amar Nath Saraf?

In the main, this narrative is the English translation of the memoir of Amar Nath Saraf as penned by him. Feeding it are personal histories of private individuals, inextricably intertwined with the larger historical forces, as I have gone on to relate below. These little traditions, the personal narratives, have been the basis on which central narrative has been fleshed out. Undoubtedly, the stories I received have enabled me to better understand Daddy's story. Then, these have acted as fillers in the gaps of the other written texts which I translated. It is clear that there is no 'one' narrative but a multiplicity of them, as I have drawn on all the available information. Newspaper articles and the editorial in five parts of Shri Narinder, editor of the newspaper **Pratap**, published from Delhi, have provided valuable insights into the chronology of events as well as the process of creation of the legend of Rajouri. The details of the movement of the Maharaja's army and the Indian army, its desertions and consolidations in those tumultuous years, are owed to the article *Rajouri Reclaimed* by K.D. Maini, in the Sunday Magazine of the **Daily Excelsior** of 15 April 2001, published from Jammu. There are the booklets by Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi and Lala Pishori Lal Jhinjhotia which tell their own stories. The difficult part

has been to create a frame within which the many strands of the story may be woven together into a coherent picture. In dealing with an actual historical event in the memoirs, the temptation to foreground that has had to be constantly curbed by the individual history. However, the fact remains that the historical event of the fall of Rajouri had been the defining moment for the individual, the community and the place. I finally chose to focus on the event using the narrative voices as perspectives on it. The result is that the structure and the timeline of the narrative have been my decisions.

In order to get a perspective on events myself, I needed to research into that period of the history of Rajouri. I was surprised to discover that there was practically nothing in recorded history to indicate what had happened there in 1947. It was as if Rajouri did not exist or that nothing had indeed happened there. It was mentioned in passing, in the war of 1947 fought in J&K, between India and the newly created Pakistan. As already mentioned, lacunae in information were partially filled with the help of newspaper articles and journalistic pieces and memoirs collected by Daddy over the years. The memoir in the form of a printed booklet in Urdu, of Mirza Faqir Mohammad Rajorvi written after his sojourn in J&K in 1984, called *Kashmir Mein Chand Roz,* has been particularly useful here. His testimony

suddenly brought in a new player in the events-Azad Kashmir. His narrative has helped to tie the events and experience of Rajouri with the larger historical movement for Azad Kashmir. Mirza Sahib was himself a leader of the Muslim Conference in Rajouri and a part of the Azad Kashmir movement of 1947. He was also a prominent citizen of Rajouri. As a Muslim and a local leader, his reading of the communally charged situation, its history, and its consequences are enlightening. He provides a fascinating account of the final movement, indeed the final moments which lead up to the fateful attack on Rajouri on the day of Diwali, even as the war between Pakistan and India played itself out in J&K, around the event of the State's accession to India on 27 October 1947. His account reveals the ironies, the betrayals and the tragic unfolding of the fate of the town, as in the scenes of a Greek tragedy.

Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi asserts that the experience at Rajouri was largely ignored by the leaders of Azad Kashmir who were unable to consolidate and convert it into a widespread movement. After the siege of Rajouri and the decimation of its Hindu population, Faqir Mohammed says, the *'mujahidee'* of Azad Kashmir in Rajouri declared it to be the principality of Azad Kashmir on 13 November 1947. Mirza Mohammed Hussain of the Jarral dynasty, was installed as its head.

However, before that, on 26 October 1947, rebels led by Sardar Ibrahim Khan from the Soodan tribe, had declared the formation of the Azad Kashmir government at Palandari in Poonch and already held two *tehsils* there. Sardar Ibrahim Khan became the President of Azad Kashmir. Mirza Faqir Mohammed laments the formation of two power centres, the one at Palandari and the one in Rajouri, and the rivalries this generated which he claims, proved to be a massive setback for the movement for Azad Kashmir. According to him, ego clashes between the two leaders harmed the movement irrevocably, and once Rajouri was reclaimed by the Indian Army, the '*mujahideen*' moved to Pakistan where many of their military leaders were arrested and discharged from duty. Mirza Mohammed Hussain was kept confined to Jhelum in Pakistan till he died there.

From November 1947 to April 1948, Rajouri had been under occupation of the so- called War Council, formed by the rebels stationed around Rajouri. It was the War Council which had helped to rehabilitate the survivors, healing wounds, providing supplies, reconciling families and restoring the ruptured bonds between the two communities. What is interesting is that none of the Hindu survivors of Rajouri mention this larger movement for Azad Kashmir. The layperson in Rajouri was perhaps unaware of the grim situation in the valley and the issues

surrounding the accession of the State to India. As at the time, in retrospect too, it seemed insignificant in relation to their individual and collective fates. For them the enemy was the Muslim and the issues were communal. The Hindus were a minority in Rajouri.

One may only assume that there is either genuine ignorance or deliberate erasure of this crucial historical fact of the Azad Kashmir movement. Perhaps the local leaders associated with it or aware of it, died in the raids of 1947. Lala Narsingh Dass, the intellectual lawyer and activist, who perhaps had the most perceptive understanding of Rajouri's historical position, was killed coming out of the military camp of the rebels in Gurdan in Azad Kashmir of the time, on Baisakhi of April 1948, even as the Indian Army moved in to recapture Rajouri. Other protagonists migrated to Pakistan. Was it simply inconvenient to be reminded of it and politically expedient to forget it?

As the 'larger picture' began to unfold, Rajouri began to make sense to me. It had been caught in the crosshairs of the Azad Kashmir movement, the communal turmoil of Partition and the issue of the accession of J&K to the Dominion of India. Like elsewhere, it had paid a huge price in terms of human life and suffering. Mirza Faqir Mohammed writes that Rajouri and Mendhar were coveted

by the *'mujahideens'* because of their natural beauty and because of their fertile soil. He also wrote about his Kashmir visit in 1984 in the Urdu daily, *Roznama Jasarat* of 18 January 1985, published from Karachi, an article titled *"Maqbuza Kashmir Mein Chand Roz"*. The reference to Indian areas of J&K as *Maqbuza* or 'occupied', is an indicator of the perception of the former *mujahideen* sympathizer of Rajouri. He asserts in the same article, that one day these areas will be reclaimed as had been promised so many years ago. In the same account he writes lovingly of Rajouri, and warmly of the hospitality he received in Jammu from former residents, mostly Hindus, of Rajouri. He stayed to be part of the constitution of a Rajouri Sabha, and inaugurated it at a nostalgic celebration in Jammu's Premier Hotel on 20 May 1984. The correspondent of **Kashmir Times** reporting on the event on 21 May 1984, writes that he had witnessed there "an unusual get-together, a touching re-union and an emotional outburst."

Another important document that I chanced upon was Lala Pishori Lal Jhinjotia's account of his travails during the raids and the occupation of Rajouri. It is again a printed booklet called *Jammu Kashmir State Ke Rajouri Nagar Ka Khooni Itihaas*. His breathless narrative reconstructs the scenes almost incoherently, and his printer has not done him justice either, but his story is valuable because he gives

an eye witness account of the massacre, the suicides, the honour killings and the condition of Rajouri during the occupation. Lala Pishori Lal belonged to the cadres of the RSS and gives us some sense of its functioning in Rajouri at the time of the siege. His account also reinforces the truth of the role that Mirza Faqir Mohammed and the War Council of rebels played in the aftermath of the raids. And importantly, his story of hardship and survival along with other members of his family testifies to the traditional bonds of community life which survived centuries of stress and the violent rupture of November 1947. He describes the difficult and often secret negotiations by which abducted women and children were exchanged privately, to protect people on both sides of the border from State action, a process in which the traditional ties existing between communities helped to set up an information network about missing people. The women of Rajouri were ransomed and brought back into families. They were married off, as were many widows of the raids. There was a shared belief in the misfortune of Rajouri, rather than the 'guilt' or 'shame' of these women.

Pishori Lal ji's account also shows, like the later account of Shri Narinder, how subsequent positions of Hindu nationalism have striven to rationalize the suicides and the brutal honor killings of women and children, by idealizing them as sacrifice at the altar of religious pride

and Mother India. This perhaps is a process of sublimation which is as inevitable as it is necessary, in the healing of wounded selves and the acceptance of the 'absurd' in existence. However, by the accounts I have, people died or were killed by their loved ones to escapes fates that they believed to be worse than death. In the context of J&K, India as the 'motherland' of Hindus would have anyway, been largely notional. The Hindu Maharaja of J&K was reluctant to accede to either India or Pakistan. The notion was given historical reality only on the date of accession, when under extreme pressure, not the least from the raids, Maharaja Hari Singh chose India and signed the Instrument of Accession.

Lala Pishori Lal died the day after he passed on his 'book' to me in Jammu, on 7 January 2007, a piece of coincidence I am unable to ignore. It seems as though I was meant to carry it forward. In fact, all the narratives that have come together in Amar Nath Saraf's 'his-story' of Rajouri, seem to emphasize that one is indeed a subject of time in the widest philosophical sense. I remain bewildered at the number of coincidences and the twists and turns of fate, which seem to determine the direction of events and the lives of human beings caught in them.

This book, to use a cliché, is a labour of love and my tribute to the spirit of survival and endurance that the

elders in the family have embodied and the extraordinary little communities they have fostered. If Shri Amar Nath's story finds just passing mention of his sons and their families, it is because to him they are in a sense, incidental. His self is constituted by the network of the residual members of the massacre and dislocation of 1947. His real emotional ties lie with the 'family' he retrieved and put together, made more precious because he lost and then found it. The people through whom he realized himself and sought fulfillment are in his past, as is his beloved Rajouri. For me, telling his story is also an attempt to recuperate in the narrative of the individual and the fate of a collective, a fragment of the troubled history of the state of J&K and indeed the sub-continent, which seems to have been consigned to oblivion.

Babli Moitra Saraf.
May 2007

Foreword

I am the casualty of what chroniclers have vaguely called "a local uprising in Poonch area", or "some excesses", committed by marauding Pashtun tribesmen in J&K in 1947. Finally we are all reduced to statistics. But Rajouri was not given even the distinction of being considered a statistical figure. What makes Rajouri unique in the familiar scenario of the Partition is that life has gone on after this event pretending it never happened. And we as the survivors have consented to that erasure of memory. Unlike, in the Punjab, poets did not lament, writers did not grieve, minstrels did not sing of the loss, the suffering and the wounds. To Rajouri, financial compensation was not offered, nor was condolence. The fall of Rajouri is forgotten, it has no place in public memory. Indeed, it never did have a place. Its name was unknown outside of J&K. In any case, at that time Delhi had its own share of troubles and woes. No one in Delhi questions why a certain part of West Delhi is called Rajouri Garden or how it was the insistent presence of hordes of displaced people carrying their bundles of sorrow which has been commemorated in the name Rajouri Garden. It reminds one of Faiz's couplet: *humse kehte hain chaman wale gharibane chaman / tum koi accha sa rakh lo apne veerane ka naam.*

The biggest misfortune is to have to leave one's land, one's people. The most miserable existence is that of

an exile. My wife and I would often talk about Rajouri, at least once a day. And she would say that we are frogs in a well. We cannot see or think beyond Rajouri. It is true. For me it's as though I can't help it. The world is big and there are strange and wondrous things in it. But Rajouri is a state of existence. Nothing comes close to it. It is perhaps true that losing something only enhances its value. Rajouri is lost to me forever. As is my dear wife, my companion of fifty-two years. Rajouri is where it all began and where it should end. I feel as though I'm in a hostile element. No one seems to remember anything. No one remembers there was a Kailash. It matters to no one that she is no more. Life goes on for all, but those like me who want to forget, are condemned to remember. Memory is a terrible thing. There are so many of them jostling for space in my mind. I don't have the patience to sort them out. Images merge into each other and the mind runs back and forth as one image produces another, like an endless chain as in cinema. But I am trying to organize my memories, chronologically. I don't know if I will be successful. Let Rajouri raise its ghosts now, so that they can be laid to rest. Rajouri must be remembered!

To be able to tell a story don't we have to begin at the beginning?

Amar Nath Saraf
May 2007

I

In1932, when I was four years old, I learnt that I was born on 28 February 1928, at 7 o'clock in the evening in Rajouri, to my mother Smt. Lajwanti and my father Lala Bihari Lal Saraf, in their home; that I had been given away a few months after my birth to be raised in the home of a *labhana* in Village Bàthuni. This was done to trick the fates, since my parents' children would inevitably die. My brother and sister were similarly raised. This was a common practice in those days. If children born to a set of parents showed the tendency to die in infancy, the set of parents was changed and the child was given foster parents till his fate sort of stabilized. Thus I stayed with my foster family for two years and then I came to Rajouri to live with my maternal uncle Lala Narsingh Dass Kaila. He was yet childless and the entire household was devoted to raising me. My maternal grandfather Shri Kanshi Ram as well as my grandmother lived there too and they brought me up with love and affection.

Every two weeks, after we children went to bed, a *pari* would come to visit my grandfather. There would be preparations for the visit all day long. My Nanaji would get incense and flowers and decorate his room. White

sheets and bolsters would be laid on the seats. There would be sweets and *paan*. Nanaji said that she would converse with him. Sometimes she would take him on a trip to other countries during the night. She had ordered him not to share the same plate he ate in with anyone else. Now his granddaughter who always ate with him would sulk and throw a tantrum. He then took special permission from the *pari* to share his food with his granddaughter. But I believe that she did not prove to be a boon to his family. I have heard that my Mamaji had two sons. The elder Ratan was burnt to death in the raids. Mamiji also died in them. The surviving members were found on the recapture of Rajouri and they joined me in Kanpur. Today they are, by the Grace of God, well settled.

At the age of 6 or 7, I began school. The school room was in a private building in Mohalla Kumaran in Rajouri and all students were required to carry a gunny bag from home to sit in the schoolroom. After class IV we shifted to a decent building which belonged to our family. There were six rooms rented out at twelve rupees a month. Here another cousin, Brij Mohan, Kullu to us, Anant Ram Mama ji's son, was in my class as he had failed in Class V. He would always laugh out loud

whenever he saw me in his class. I've never been able to find out why.

In 1932, when I was four years old, my grand uncle, my paternal grandfather's brother Lala Mohan Lal Saraf died. I hear that a two- year mourning was declared in our family. We did not participate in any celebration anywhere. Since his wife Hira Devi was also my *maasi*, the period of mourning continued beyond two years. My grand-uncle had been a name to reckon with in Rajouri. He had constructed two temples and one *dharmashala* in the memory of his ancestors. Thousands of *kanals* of fertile land was attached to these. Lala Pishori Lal who survived the raids and saw and lived in the surrounding villages of Rajouri from its occupation in November 1947 to its liberation in April 1948, has mentioned Lala Mohan Lal Saraf as a highly respected citizen of Rajouri. He recounts one of the legends that grew around him. Once Lalaji had left town for a day and when he returned he found the bazaar shut down. On asking why it was so he was told that a burglary had taken place and all the shopkeepers and their men had been rounded up by the police. He went straight to the police station and confronted the officers saying, "who has died that you have collected these mourners here?" He even added

that they should have known that the people of this town were not thieves. The police let everyone go.

A private trust was set up for the temples and its property whose management was within the family. The private trust was registered after the death of Lala Mohan Lal Saraf. His widow, Smt. Hira Devi became the manager of the trust. Lala Maniram Saraf, her sister Dhanwanti's husband and my mausa, was the trust's attorney. However, he died at the young age of 35 and my father took up the work of the attorney. He continued for 14 years upto1945. That year Smt. Hira Devi passed away. After her death there was dispute over her property.

Mohan Lal Saraf and Hira Devi had had no children. Lalaji had sent his sister's son Dina Nath to England for higher studies. He had wanted to adopt him. But that did not happen for many reasons. Dina Nath Ji married an English woman and this was not looked upon kindly by Lala ji and his wife. My father and his cousin Lala Bhagat Ram Saraf contested the claim of Dina Nath and his brother Amar Nath, sons of Lalaji's sister and Lakhpat Rai Mirpuri. It was for this reason that Amar Nath settled in Rajouri with his father. His mother could be closer to her brother's widow. Dina Nath ji was in England but the rest of them died in the raids of 1947

and that put an end to the litigation. It was in 1950, when Dina Nath ji foreign-returned, was serving as the Chief Engineer in P.W.D. Rajouri, that he came to a final settlement with me regarding the trust, and its management passed to me as the eldest living heir of the Sarafs.

In my Nana ji's house was my Nani ji and a daughter from his first marriage. She had been married off at the age of six and her husband had died soon after. She remained in her state of widowhood for sixty years. My grandparents and Mama- Mami were very good people. My Mamaji, Lala Narsingh Dass, had done his LLB from Lahore in 1936. He practiced law in Rajouri, not for money, but to pass his time fruitfully. He was fluent in Hindi, Urdu and English. He was a poet and was also interested in astrology.

In 1941, Sheikh Abdullah, President of the National Conference, himself came to Rajouri and interacted with prominent local citizens, and Mamaji was welcomed into the National Conference. There was a huge party in the *dharmashala* of Rajouri on the occasion. Most of Lala Narsingh Dass ji's friends were Muslims. Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi and Mirza Mohammed Hussain, later to become a bitter rival of Sardar Ibrahim Khan of Azad Kashmir, were especially close to him. They saved him

from a mob during the raids of 1947. But in April 1948, when the Indian forces were approaching Rajouri to reclaim it, he and his brother-in-law Durga Dass, were shot dead five miles from Rajouri while coming out of the Gurdan military camp, where he had gone to consult Aslam Khan of the rebel forces of Azad Kashmir. The reason for his death remains shrouded in mystery though there are many speculations. Some say he was killed on orders because he knew too much of the plans of the *mujahideen.*

In 1943, Rajouri became the venue for the All India Hindu Conference. Mamaji was a role-model also for the Hindu community. They admired him for his competence and oratorial skills. It seems they could not identify anyone else like him among the Hindus to represent their cause. The small community of Hindus, of Rajouri, practically all kinsmen, pleaded with Mamaji and compelled him to join the Hindu Mahasabha and contribute to its success. Much against his wishes he bowed to the desire of the community. His welcome address on the occasion was the subject of much discussion and praise both in the local and the Indian press. I have some memories of what he had said but no other record. In his speech he had said that times were changing rapidly. If the Hindus had felt themselves safe

during the tumultuous time in J&K and had not suffered, it was only because the State had a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. Hindustan would be free. Small states would be wiped out. Life would become ridden with conflict and there would be no peace anywhere. But in spite of this, he exhorted the Hindus to think as subjects of a nation and not limit themselves to narrow sectarian interests, if they wanted to survive the times. He urged them to choose a leader and faithfully follow the person. Many dignitaries came to attend the Hindu Conference. There were leaders like Gopal Dutt Menghi, Jyotish Ram Kishan, Miss Shanta Bharti and Shri Narsingh Das Nargis, who was the editor of the publication **Chand** of Jammu. Chowdhry Ram Lal Sada Bharti became the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha. Chand Kiran Sharda from Rajasthan was a special invitee. In his speech he addressed the Hindus of Rajouri saying that though they were a minority there, if any trouble were to befall them, the Hindus from all over India would come to their help. But after the destruction of 1947 in which thousands of Hindu men and women from Rajouri, Mirpur and Bhimber were massacred, it was found that neither Sharda ji nor any other Hindu from India came to help.

In the year 1932 there was turbulence in the State of J&K. Sheikh Abdullah was leading a movement against

what he called the corrupt and exploitative rule of Maharaja Hari Singh. This was the call of Quit Kashmir, whereby Kashmir was to be restored to the people of Kashmir. There was communal violence all over the State. Rajouri in those days was a tehsil with 98% Muslims and 2% Hindus. Riots broke out between the two communities. Many died in these. Pishori Lal narrates how his family was uprooted from Jhinjot Kedi and walked for three days to reach Rajouri. Darhal Malika had also been affected and kinspeople from there too were at Rajouri. In fact, there were riots everywhere in the State where Hindus were in a minority. Muslims from the tehsil's villages had gathered to attack and loot Rajouri town but some mounted soldiers of Raja Hari Singh's forces arrived and the mob was dispersed. Rajouri itself was not greatly affected but the Hindus here began to worry about the future. What would be he conditions of the minority in the times to come?

In Qasbah Rajouri I am told, the Hindus would lie awake the whole night. I was only four years old. We would sleep at my grand-uncle Bhagat Ram Saraf's house which was like a fortress. He along with other men took turns in keeping watch. My Tayaji Jagat Ram Saraf, was there with us and whenever I would cry out at night he would silence me with *mithai*. My cries heard outside could

invite danger. Tayaji died in 1935 or '36. He had a son Manoharlal who was later killed in the massacre of 1947.

I was, because of all this, aware at a very young age that the future of Hindus in Rajouri was dark, and indeed we could not hope to carry on life in peace. We would have to live in perpetual fear. But what could we do? We had thousands of *kanals* of land. People those days could not afford to pay revenue in cash and they preferred to sell their land to pay their dues. Because of this we could buy up good fertile land. Mamaji often used to say that generations of Hindu moneylenders had killed the poor many times over, and that were we to die once at their hands, their revenge would still not be complete. People did have less money but life was good.

Good quality rice was priced at Rs 2 for forty kilos. Wheat and maize sold at 11 annas for forty kilos. These sell now at Rs 12/13 a kilo. Desi ghee sold at 65 paise per kilo. All these were very cheap. Children were not fussed over too much. I remember that at meal time we would be seated on the kitchen floor in a row and given *makki ki roti* held like a plate in our palms. On that would be put the *saag* or *kaladi* which we were to eat

with it. The bigger shares were always reserved for the adults. It was said in Rajouri that children had a lifetime ahead to eat, adults but some years!

When in Class VI, I would go to Master Hakim Chand's house for tuitions. There were twenty others who came to study. Rs 2/- per head was the tuition fee. The standard of study was such that an M.A. from there would find it difficult to teach a fourth class student now. My mother was diabetic. She was always indisposed. She had this great desire to see me at least engaged to be married. Rajouri was a small place. It did not look outside for matrimonial alliances. Not beyond Bhimber, Naushera , Kotli, Mirpur, in any case. It was said of the Mirpuri Mahajans that their married daughters would stay the whole day in their natal homes and come to their husband's home at night. In the morning they would cook for the men of the family, feed them and send them off to work. Then they would pack up for the day and with their children land up at their mother's. They would stay there to gossip and eat their meals. At sundown they would have supper and pack the evening meal for their husband and go back to the matrimonial home. There was no conflict of interests here because all the women did it. Other Mahajans were wary of marrying into the Mirpuris.

Kinship networks were almost impossible to unravel. Tertiary alliances complicated relationships but who cared? There was a pesky meddling into everyone's business by everyone else because one's business was not one's own at all. This was seen as love and concern, and at the end of the day did cement relationships. The tradition of *gila-shikwa* was alive. And the ritual of expressing complaints and grievances was as customary as the *roothna-manana*. People would not speak to each other for years and then on the occasion of a family marriage there would be the ritual of breaking the ice and mending fences. The injured party would be placated for real or imagined wrongs done to it – after all, how could the son's *baraat* get an auspicious start without So and So? Of course, people would catapult and succumb to these overtures of affection and respect - till the next offence! And thus the ritual would perpetuate itself. Life would go on and be more savoury for the *nokjhok*, without any serious breach of ties.

In keeping with my mother's wishes, at age 12, I was engaged to marry Master Hakim Chand's daughter. Her name was Kuntal. I never actually saw her. Only once I had caught a glimpse of her running across the stairway to her home. My mother was pleased with the alliance but she died within six months of it. The engagement

lasted till 1947, when in the general destruction, Master Hakim Chand's entire family took poison and died. Of late Kuntal has been appearing in my dreams. She is draped in white. She tells me in a distant voice, barely a whisper, that she has been waiting for me, even though I had not waited. I dreamt about her again after my wife's death. She always says the same thing to me. What should I make of it? She is added to my list of losses.

In main Rajouri there was only one Middle School and there were a few scattered primary schools in the villages of the entire *tehsil*. Many places did not have schools at all. After passing Class 8, I went to Mirpur (now in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, POK), to stay with relatives and do Class 9. When I came back to Rajouri for the summer vacation, a Class 9 had been added there too, and I stayed on to complete the class and stood first in History. The Headmaster was a learned Muslim gentleman from Akhnoor and he was very pleased with me. For Class 10 in 1943, I went to Bhimber (POK) and passed my Matric in 1944. Panjab University was a big and renowned university in those days. It was wartime. The exam papers were very simple because of a drive by the British to recruit young people into the army. The ones who passed the exam were recruited.

Though I was engaged to Kuntal, it did not end speculation about my marital prospects. We were a respected family and *saraf,* by profession Also, I was the only one who had matriculated outside of Rajouri *tehsil* and who had gone to Bhimber for 'higher' studies. There were many offers of marriage from many good families. But even if I had wanted, there was no way I could have had any say. Breaking off an engagement was not only difficult but impossible. The Soni family had left their village and settled in Rajouri. They lived in my maternal uncle's vicinity. They too had proposed marriage with their daughter. My father was sent a message. I was not keen to marry there. Then they offered to give a shop in dowry. A shop those days was worth 400-500 rupees. I was still not amenable. Then they offered an alternate match from their family thinking I did not approve of the first one. When the proposal was put to me I realized that they were just not taking me seriously. I began to rave and rant from the terrace of my home so that they could hear me. Only then did they get the message that I was not interested in the proposal. One of the girls is still alive. Her husband died in the raids of 1947.

After my Matriculation from Bhimber, I came back to Rajouri. My father was of the opinion that I should

shoulder responsibility of the family trade as soon as possible. At fourteen, alarmed I ran to Mamaji. I had been raised in my *nanihaal.* Mamaji was my protector. He would rescue me. How could I be confined to the family business without having seen the world, without having tasted 'college life'? He spoke to Pitaji. Making virtue out of necessity, he declared that Amar needs to be better educated, needs to mature, needs to become worldly wise, for times are changing. He must go to college. The family business is always there. He will come back to it. But education... Well, he prevailed upon my father and I set out for Jammu, the eldest scion of a rich father, without a worry in the world, for my share of adventures. It was 1944. In the May of 1944, I joined F.A. in Jammu and cleared my exams. Back to Rajouri and this time the threat of confinement through work was made more dire by the idea of marriage. I went to Mamaji again. Mamaji recommended college and BA for me so that I could "enjoy' myself for another couple of years. In the hot and wet July of 1947, I spent a memorable and glorious summer vacation in Rajouri and readied myself for college life.

Prem ji too had just finished her F.A. exam and was in Rajouri for the next two months. She was related to me as a maternal cousin. She was also my prospective

mother in law's niece. Prem ji's arrival in Rajouri heralded a wonderful time. Two months just passed away playing cards, gossiping and chatting. I accompanied her to Naryala and Racchwaha, both 25 miles away from Rajouri, and there we spent a week together. Both these villages are now with India. From the mountain ranges there we had a clear view of the region which later came to be known as Azad Kashmir. There too Premji and I spent our time in joy and laughter. We had gone with Master Sant Ram and Hakim Chand ji who were both native to these places. They would play cards the whole day. Premji and I were partners in the card game *Kot- Pees,* against them. We would win at least 15-20 rounds in the game through the day. The dealing of cards in defeat would finally tire them out. We came back to Rajouri after a week, and after a few days Prem ji set off for Lahore College to do her B.A. and I went off to the Prince of Wales College in Jammu. We set off together from Wazirabad, Premji with her Chacha Bihari Lal ji, went off to Lahore and I started off for Jammu with my friend Balraj Kohli on a bus and joined first year of the BA. course.

The beautiful daughter of Chacha Bihari Lal ji, Sunder Shanta, Premji's cousin, died in the raids of 1947. She was as intelligent as she was beautiful. Her parents were

paralytic. She served them with a rare dedication. Her father too was killed in 1947, her mother survived. Sunder Shanta had been engaged to the son of Mangaram. He had not cleared his Middle School and he would suck on two fingers. He would graze a couple of goats on the mountain slopes. Once Prem ji and I chased away his goats and he sat down to wail as we rolled with laughter. Clearly, he was not the man after Sunder Shanta's heart. She expressed her anguish many times at this proposal. But it was not easy to break off an engagement. Finally,1947 settled the problem. In the raids of 1947 the Pathans confronted the family. They said if the girl was handed over to them they would spare her father and uncle. The uncle was ready to let her go but her father signaled to her to suck on the cyanide already given to her for such an eventuality. Thus she ended her life. My fiancée Kuntal too, along with her mother and aunt consumed poison in the *tehsil* compound. Their men were massacred in the adjoining fields.

I remember those days when Kumarji would come to my house in the mornings. He would wait, often for hours, for me to get up. We would go to the river. Many hours would be spent at the Baidka Maidaan playing ball, *gulli danda* and *kabaddi*. There was a pool of water

where cattle would soak and urinate. In winters it would be frozen over. We would collect the ice, wash it claiming sufficient cleanliness for it and suck on it. We were friends, Manohar, my cousin, Brij Mohan and Krishan Kumar who was the son of Mehta Kikar Singh. We would stage plays as children. Kumar had danced a few times on stage and collected ten rupees, a princely sum in those days. He organized a feast with some others and I was not told. I was angry. I was to play the role of Bhishma Pitamaha in a forthcoming play. But I sulked. And the play could not go on. The culprits finally fell at my feet and asked to be forgiven. They collected twenty rupees and gave me all of it and only then did I play my role.

My family had a lot of land. We would go to collect the share of the harvest about twelve to fifteen times during the year. In the months of Paus and Magh, December-January, I would go with friends. Lunch would be arranged at a cool spring by the tillers. A large chicken would be cooked in 750 gms of butter to be eaten with rice. Often we would cook ourselves. It was delicious and I used to wait the year for this season. The Muslims there were courteous and gentle people. They would participate in our events of joy and sorrow, marriages and deaths. There was a reciprocal giving

of gifts and *sagan*. A solitary woman decked in her ornaments could travel on horseback from Rajouri to Naushera. A Muslim youth would escort her horse. There was no question of anyone looking up even to gaze at her. Those were the times we had. Later between 1943 and 1947 the world changed and the past remained as in a dream.

II

Rajouri— my *watan*, with its aching, moving beauty is now a place within my heart. Once upon a time it lay outside connected to the larger networks of history, myth and legend. Recently, I read an article about Rajouri in a Jammu local paper called **Public Times,** whose editor is Ravi Braroo. It was titled- *Know About Rajouri District.* I learnt for the first time that it was identified by many as the region of Panchaal Desh. Rajouri, it is claimed was part of the kingdom of Panchal *naresh*. It was known as Raj Puri - land of the kings, which nestled in the lap of the mighty Peer Panjal range. It is believed that the second wave of Aryan migrants crossed the Himalayas in the north and came in from the west to settle in the area of Rajouri and Poonch. During the Buddhist period it formed part of the territory of Gandhar. Later, it seems, it was included in the domain called Darabhisanga which contained the hilly stretch from Poonch to Kashmir. At that time Laharkote in Poonch and Rajouri had been the two most powerful states of the region. In 4.BC, there existed in the north-west of India, a federal type of configuration of regions called Abhisaar whose capital was Rajouri.

In the Mauryan Period it had been a flourishing centre of trade. Hiuen -Tsang traveling through the region in 632 AD mentions it in his travelogue as a part of the Kashmiri Dominion. It was ruled by the Pala dynasty in the11th century under the Suzerainty of Kashmir (1003 AD -1194 AD). Alberuni visited Rajouri with Sultan Masood, the son of Sultan Mahmud in 1036 AD and refers to it as Raja Vari. This name recurs in the **Rajatarangini** of Srivar written during the reign of Sultan Zain –ul Abideen, as it does in the **Rajatarangini** of Praja Bhatt in the sixteenth century. According to Kalhan's **Rajatarangini,** Rajouri emerged as a principality around 1003 AD. Its first ruler was Raja Prithvi Pal who defended the Peer Panjal Pass at the time of the invasion of Sultan Mahmud in 1021AD. In 1089, Raja Harsh of Kashmir was fiercely repelled by Raja Sangram Pal's forces at Prithvi Pal Fort and went back without capturing Rajouri. In 1097, Sangram Pal went on to attend a Council of rulers of neighboring dependencies called by Raja Harsh.

In **Tarikh-e Rajgan-e Rajour**, Mirza Zafarullah Khan records that during the reign of Raja Amna Pain 1194 AD, one of his Punjabi *durbaris* Noor-ud-din, led a revolt against the Raja and killed him, thus laying the foundation of the Jarral dynasty of Muslim rulers in Rajouri

from 1194 to the October of 1846. The Jarrals retained the title of Raja and Rahim-ullah Khan was the last ruler of the principality. Rajouri was renovated and rebuilt by the Jarrals. The Mughal route from Gujarat (in Pakistan), to Kashmir passed through nearby Chingis. The area was dotted with *baolis*, forts, *sarais* and *baradaris*. The Jarrals were liberal in their patronage of the local Hindus. Raja Aznat Ullah in 1683, had a Hindu minister from the Mehta community in Rajouri and Rajputs were the preferred recruits in the Raja's army. In 1815, Raja Agar Ullah Khan defended Rajouri against Maharaja Ranjit Singh and in the same year, against Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu. In 1846, under the Amritsar Pact between the ruling British and Raja Gulab Singh, Rajouri, along with the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), was handed over to the latter, who was then designated the Maharaja of J&K. Gulab Singh changed the name of Rajouri to Rampur and appointed Mian Hatthu as its Governor, who continued till 1856. After him Rajouri was converted to a *tehsil* and affiliated to the district of Bhimber. In 1904 it was clubbed with the district of Reasi. After Independence, Rajouri became part of the newly constituted Poonch-Rajouri District. In 1968, it became a separate district.

I spent the first eighteen years of my life oblivious to and uncaring of this history of Rajouri. For me Rajouri was the most beautiful place I could imagine, a scintillating town in the embrace of two rivers, *darya,* we called them, the Tawi and the Darhal Tawi, both actually mountain streams. These hold so many dear memories and so much pain. Rajouri, its narrow little lanes and bylanes, which would lead me to the pampering lap of aunts and uncles or to the company of playmates and friends. And of course, offer the occasional glimpse of young girls living modestly within the *chardiwari* of their homes, waiting to be sent in their *dolis* to their marital homes, their real homes.

Born into a landed family of Sarafs, indigenous bankers-moneylenders, to be precise, my youth was an unending saga of swims in the river, picnics on its banks, rides into the forests or other neighbouring places like Naushera and Mirpur. In this way I travelled across some of the most breathtakingly beautiful places in the world. Being the eldest son, all my misdemeanours were borne with love and patience, especially by my stepmother. I did not discover for many years that my *mother* was actually my stepmother. She and I would talk for hours. She would confide in me. My younger brother Raj, would usually be with our *fufi* who

pampered him. I had a stepbrother too, Rajnish, many, many years my junior.

My Mamaji, Lala Narsingh Dass, indulged all my youthful fancies and constantly made excuses for me, often funding my pranks. Mamaji was a brilliant man, a role model for any generation and my hero. I adored him. I have mentioned above that he had formidable command over Hindi, Urdu and English. He wrote poetry in Urdu and was a necessary presence at *mushairas*. He was one of the leading citizens of Rajouri. Handsome and popular, he was loved and respected by all. He was a visionary who could read the sign of the times. He was to play a leading role in the dark days which lay ahead unknown to us, right up to his tragic end. Unlike me, he really knew his history.

In the July of 1947, the political situation became bad with every passing day and with it law and order. As talks of Partition hit the public there was fear, anxiety and speculation. People from the Punjab were already pouring into our State. My summer vacations were coming to an end and I started out from Rajouri for Jammu with my friend Balraj Kohli to begin my B.A. The bus broke down on the way and it took us ten days to finally reach Jammu. Within a few months, by October 1947, I had

to move out of the hostel of Prince of Wales College in Jammu because of deteriorating political and social conditions. I had no money because the routes through which it reached me had become erratic and unsafe. Postal services had become unreliable and practically no one traveling to Jammu from Rajouri could carry money for me. So I went to stay at Jagdish Mirpuri's house. He was a distant relative who would become a closer one by marriage, but that was still in the future. Those days Amravati and her daughter Kailash were staying there too. Jagdish ji was Kailash's uncle, husband of her maternal aunt. Her father, Dr Malik Ram Gupta was stuck in Mirpur where his old mother still lived with other relatives. Later he arrived in Jammu after many close shaves and losing all that he possessed, including his mother whom he had carried on his back as people fled from Mirpur. The trek to Jammu was arduous and dangerous and his old mother had finally forced him to go onwards to safety as she stayed back propped up against a tree in the dense forests in the mountains to meet her destiny.

Hostilities between Muslims and Hindus were breaking out in Jammu even as the date of the Partition drew near and speculation was rife about the final award to the two newly formed Dominions of India and Pakistan.

The position of J&K was uncertain as Maharaja Hari Singh did not seem to be in a hurry to accede to either. In the valley there was a movement going on which demanded independence for Kashmir and it had concentrated on the border areas, with Pakistan actively backing the movement. Sheikh Abdullah was in jail for moving against the Maharaja and demanding a democratic system of governance. Prime Minister Kak had also been jailed on charges of corruption. It was clear that His Highness had trouble on all fronts. There was no army presence in the city of Jammu. Every night, the RSS cadres would don military uniforms and patrol neighbourhoods so that people would be led to believe that the army was there. I remember once there was news of an attack planned by the Muslims on Jammu *shahar* but it was preempted by a Hindu attack on Muslims two days before the scheduled attack on Hindus. A large number of Muslims were killed. Some tried to escape to Sialkot. They were also killed on the way. Their women were carried off by the Hindus. I remember hearing on Pakistan radio that these killings would be avenged - in Mirpur, Bhimber, Rajouri, Kotli, Mendhar.... I was very sad and worried. I met Mohan Lal Motyal ji and Jagdeesh ji who were RSS leaders in Jammu. I pleaded with them to help stop the killings in Jammu or else our families would be wiped out on the borders.

They expressed helplessness. Everything had gained its own momentum and was moving in a direction which no one could control. Pashtun tribesmen, infiltrated by Pakistani military were moving towards Srinagar to occupy it, leaving a trail of loot, arson, murder and rape on the way. On 27 October 1947, the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession to India and Indian troops were flown into Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah was released from jail on Nehru's intervention. We started praying to the gods to deliver our families. We even met the new Prime Minister of J&K, Shri Meher Chand Mahajan who it is said, did send some units of the army towards Rajouri, but Sheikh Abdullah put in a request for the army to be sent to Reasi. The army went to Reasi where Muslims were being massacred. Perhaps if the army had reached Rajouri, it too would have been spared the massacre. But that did not happen and on the eve of Diwali the raiders attacked Rajouri.

That same night of Diwali I dreamt that a new bride had just got into her *doli* and her family was in *parikrama*, circumambulating the *doli*. There was something sinister and sorrowful about the scene, I remember, as when you are saying farewell to a loved daughter who has ceased to be a part of your life, and your heart breaks. I woke up with a start and also woke up everyone. I

recounted my dream saying that Rajouri was gone, finished, that very night! In the morning we woke to the news on the radio of the fall of Rajouri. It was also mentioned in the newspapers. The inevitable had happened.

November 1947 – Diwali- the festival of lights came, in spite of the dance of death and destruction in the north of India, in the aftermath of the Partition. That Diwali however, snuffed out forever the lights of Rajouri. Later, much later, a chronology of events was worked out. The day after Diwali however, there remained only the blood-spattered shreds of the horrific happenings. It had indeed been an eventful day. The rush of the invaders, the mutilated bodies, the burnt homes, the memory of leading loved ones to death, to kill the women and the girls first...memories of rapes, abductions, the butchering, hunger and thirst... the flights of frightened people hiding in the nearby forests trying to save themselves and the terror of being hunted down.

What happened on Diwali? There are many horror stories told by the survivors. From Faqir Mohammed and Pishori Lal's written accounts I learnt that by the evening prior to the attack, the Hindus of Rajouri knew that there would be no Indian Army coming in to defend them.

They knew they were marked men. Rajouri had been surrounded by the *mujahideen* of the Azad Kashmir forces, which contained deserters from the Maharaja's army, Pakistani armymen in plainclothes and Pashtun tribesmen on a rampage across Kashmir. They enjoyed the collaboration of local villagers, largely disgruntled tillers, exploited peasantry and indebted Muslims. Members of the Pakistan backed Muslim Conference, active in the border areas, were also sympathetic to the raiders. Martyrdom- the path shown by Banda Veer Bairagi had been the only way out for the remaining Hindu population, says the RSS, when it recounts the fate of the Hindus later in its own account of those days. Many had left the town in anticipation of being attacked. Others has fled under the cover of night because the RSS cadres were stopping Hindus and forcing them to stay on in the hope of finding strength in numbers. Some had stayed on unable to move, others confident that their own status as prominent citizens would shield them from attacks. Among them were leaders like Shri Dina Nath Kaila and Mamaji, Shri Narsingh Das.

Dina Nath ji had spent the few preceding days procuring the deadly potassium cyanide from the labs of the local school, as an emergency measure. As the local leader of the RSS he knew he would not be spared if captured.

Well, the hour of reckoning was finally there. Various individual versions exist of those terrible final moments. The Hindus had already gathered on the Maidaan of Tehsil on hearing the bugle. It had been decided earlier that the moment when the fall became imminent, a bugle would be sounded. It is said that prominent leaders, in full public view, were the first ones to consume poison. Soon the women and many men in the crowd fell dead with the deadly poison. The poison soon ran out. There were many more of the living. Women started jumping into the *darya* holding infants to their breasts. Men began to behead their women. Those who did not have weapons, were exhorted by their womenfolk to crush their heads with boulders, preferring to die at the hands of their loved ones than give themselves up to the marauders who circled the Maidaan as vultures circling around their prey. Even before the physical occupation of Rajouri, the Hindu localities were razed to the ground. There was blood everywhere.

Rajouri's historical tryst has been with fire. Raja Tung Rai , the Prime Minister of Queen Didda of Kashmir had first burnt it down in 1008 AD. In 1815, Maharaja Ranjit Singh did the honours. In 1947, plumes of black smoke rose again and the tongues of flame destroyed everything, burning alive trapped men women and children,

as the predominantly wooden structures crackled and burned. Rajouri was consigned to flames once again. This was Rajouri's particular Diwali lighting, its festive glow. Many women and children were abducted. The women done, the men were rounded up from neighbouring *qasbahs* and taken to the Maidaan above the *naala*, where the current airfield has been built, and brutally executed. It is said that the order from superiors was that bullets should not be used. Ammunition was expensive and in short supply. The massacre was carried out with swords, daggers and axes. The numbers were in thousands and later, decapitated skulls excavated when the airfield was made, became a mute testimony to the act. I only have a black and white photograph.

Many Hindus especially those under the influence of the RSS, had stayed on in Rajouri, confident that the Indian army would arrive in time to save the town. Thousands of Hindus from neighbouring villages had poured into Rajouri town seeking shelter and safety in numbers over the preceding three days. So, even though the local Hindu population was around 38 thousand, at the time of the attack the numbers had risen considerably. Before the carnage, Mamaji was still negotiating peace and safe passage, using his good offices with the local influential Muslim citizens and leaders of the Muslim

Conference. It was a result of the universal goodwill he enjoyed that he was rescued from a mob and given refuge in the home of a local Muslim. My Naniji, his mother, survived with three of his four children. Mamiji died of the poison she had consumed and her son was burnt to death with the servant when a house where they had hidden was set on fire. Families who had tried to escape in the dead of the night did not all reach their destinations. My own father had set out for the village of his *sasural,* confident that kinship and community bonds would protect him as the son-in-law of the village,. He was found dead and mutilated. It is rumored that he had given money and jewellery to a passer by to end the agony of his tortured body. Rajouri fell after three days of rioting, and on 13 November 1947, the forces of occupation moved in calling themselves the War Council of Rajouri. Backed by Pakistan it set up its government. 1% of the Hindus had survived.

It is useful to recall at this point that Rajouri was at the centre of a massive political game. Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi in his account in *Maqbuza Kashmir mein Chand Roz* clearly identifies it as a region coveted by the separatist Islamist *jehadi* forces who talked about Azad Kashmir backed by Pakistan. These were the *mujahideen* of the War Council. Rajouri because of its

Muslim majority, its captivating beauty and the fertile nature of its soil, was put on the agenda of the separationists along with Mendhar.

In October 1947, when Maharaja Hari Singh sent his forces to the area of Rajouri to defend it, his colonel, Rahmatullah Khan revolted against the State government and deserted the forces. Colonel Rahmatullah Khan was posted at Jhangar in command of 9JAK Company under the overall command of Brigadier Chattar Singh stationed in Mirpur. In October 1947, rebels took over the area of Sensa in Mirpur district. The Brigadier ordered the Colonel to move to recapture Sensa. He rushed there immediately but was engaged by rebels at Juna. 3 JAK under Major Nasrullah was then dispatched to reinforce 9JAK. It is said that in Juna, both Rahmatullah and Nasrullah were influenced by rebels to desert the Indian Army. Along with JCOs and some others, they revolted against their own forces, killing the Gurkha sepoys of their own companies. They then marched on to Troachi Fort, 22 miles from Jhangar, held by the Gurhkhas in the command of Captain Raghubir Singh Thapa. Eliminating them they collected more deserters and moved towards Rajouri and reached the jungles of Chacchera on 28 October 1947, the day after the signing of the *Instrument* of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh.

As an officer of the army, the Colonel was aware not only of the layout of the terrain but also the vulnerable nature of the defence of Rajouri. Only two platoons were defending the town- the Gurkha Platoon, 2 JAK under the command of Subedar Major Bhim Singh, and a Dogra Platoon. The Colonel began to put pressure on the town. Two *tehsils* of Poonch were already under the rebels led by Sardar Ibrahim Khan, and he had declared the formation of the Azad Kashmir Government on 24 October 1947, at Palandri in Poonch. With the news of the advent of Colonel Rahmatullah's forces in the jungles of Chacchera, Ibrahim Khan dispatched another contingent of rebels under the command of Sakhi Diler, to join him in the first week of November 1947. According to Mirza Faqir Mohammed, he himself and other prominent Muslim citizens of Rajouri were already in touch with the *mujahideen* of Azad Kashmir. He was the President of the Muslim Conference. He was also active in Rajouri in his interaction with its Hindu minority.

Faqir Mohammed relates how led by prominent citizens like Narsingh Dass and Dina Nath, Advocate, the Hindus were looking for ways to save themselves from the inevitable.On 8 November, the Hindu leaders, in anticipation of the attack on Rajouri the next day, tried to negotiate with the rebels stationed all around, through

the agency of their Muslim co citizens. Narsingh Dass had long held the conviction which he often voiced among the community, that communal ties in the region came under immense strain primarily because of the *sahukaari* system, the practice of moneylending, whose practioners were the Hindu Mahajans. This put the yoke of debt eternally on the debtors, mostly the predominantly poor Muslims. The rancour and resentment under these circumstances were natural. He had talked for a while of constituting a Reconciliation Board, a *Misalti Board*, which would scrutinize all account books, recover whatever the debtors could pay off and write off the debts of all debtors who could not pay back. The Board would consist, from the Hindu end, of Lala Bihari Lal Sarpanch, Lala Dina Nath Modi Advocate, and Lala Narsingh Dass. From the Muslim side there would be Mirza Faqir Mohammed, Mirza Mohammed Hussain Khan and Chowdhry Dewan Ali. This suggestion had already been hailed as an intelligent, even brilliant move, but before such a Board could be set up, events had gathered momentum and the political order had changed. On the fateful evening of 8 November 1947, Narsingh Dass ji reiterated this to Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi and Mirza Mohammed Hussain. However, the urgency of the moment, the desperate situation, called for more desperate measures.

Mirza Faqir Mohammed recounts in his memoirs the following: On behalf of the Hindu community who were looking for a way out, literally now, Narsingh Dass ji pledged a sum of Rs 3 crores in cash, to be given to the rebels along with qasbah Rajouri. In addition, they would convert to Islam and declare allegiance to Pakistan and become citizens of Pakistan. In case these proposals were not acceptable, he asked that the Hindus be allowed to take sufficient resources for their basic needs and be given safe passage to Delhi. "We are at the mercy of the Muslims. Please convey to your officers that almost 40, 000 people are collected here".

Mirza Faqir Mohammed Rajorvi recalls how these proposals were welcomed by the Muslim Conference and put to the rebels by himself and Mirza Matiullah Khan and Mohammed Hussain Darzi of Rajouri, on the evening of 8 November at the camp in Karaiyan where they had been called by Rahmatullah Khan. He also records the response of Rahmatullah Khan and Sakhi Diler. To the offer by the Hindus of becoming citizens of Pakistan, they said that they did not have the authority (*ikhtyar nahin hai*) to confer citizenship. To the offer of their converting to Islam they said that the converts could never be trusted (*eitbaar nahin hai*). To the plea for safe passage they said that once in Delhi, these people would

only augment the forces of the enemy. Mirza Faqir Mohammad writes that he and others from Rajouri insisted on the last. These are *banias*, not warriors, they said. "Wherever they go they will be a burden on society. Please promise to consider it. Don't attack today." It was finally acceptable to the rebel officers.

A message was sent to the Hindus on 8 November saying the following: Ten thousand rebels had surrounded Rajouri. If the Hindus wanted to go to India in peace and safety, they would have to come out on the Maidaan of Baidka with their families. They would be led safely to India. Mirza Faqir Mohammed mentions that a Harijan boy was dispatched with this message to Pandit Harji Lal Tehsildar of Rajouri. Pandit ji got the information and without telling anything to anyone left the town under cover of darkness with his family, taking the Dogra forces along for protection. On 9 November, Colonel Rahmatullah Khan laid the siege of Rajouri. and began firing. There was some retaliation from the depleted Gurkha Platoon and the volunteers of the RSS. By 10 November these were all but silenced.

Mirza Sahib recalls that on 10 November, Lala Bihari Lal Sarpanch, who had been party to all the negotiations mentioned above, had put down the conditions from the

Hindus in writing, to be formally presented to the Azad forces, but had found no one to take the letter to them. In the meantime, the Hindus had begun to congregate at the *tehsil* Maidaan. In the emotionally charged situation, with honour *(khuddari)* at stake and overpowering hopelessness, they started killing their women mercilessly, writes Faqir Mohammed. Some ran away and sought refuge in the surrounding villages with sympathetic Muslim families. The awaited attack came at night and wiped out the remaining Gurkha and Dogra soldiers. Shri Narinder, the editor of the newspaper **Pratap,** reports from his visit to Rajouri many years later, where he spoke to many people, that after the Hindus were rounded up on the present day air field, prominent local Muslims like Maulvi Wali Shah, Mufti Azam Pahar, Maulvi Sahab Mohammed and others protested, fearing for the lives of their co- citizens. They pleaded with Rahmatullah and Sakhi Diler to spare them, as the Hindus had sought refuge with them and were in their protection. These pleas however, fell on deaf ears and on 11 November, at least four thousand people were killed. The massacre began on 10 November and continued for three days.

On 13 November Mirza Mohammed Hussain of the Jarral dynasty, was nominated by the rebel Rahmatullah, to run the administration of Rajouri as the head of the

'Revolutionary Council'(called War Council above). He chose the council members. This was regarded as a serious breach of protocol by the faction of Sardar Ibrahim Khan of Poonch. For, by this move two governments were declared in the rebel occupied areas: at Taraarkhaal in Palandri, Poonch, on 24 October 1947, under Sardar Ibrahim Khan, and the second one in Rajouri under Mirza Mohammed Hussain. The two leaders were bitter rivals and divided by clan and personal interests. Mirza Mohammed Hussain forced the Mirpuri officers posted by Ibrahim Khan in Rajouri to go back. Then he established his own principality, under the protection of the deserters of the Maharaja's forces, and governed till 13 April 1948. Mirza Faqir Mohammed's account tells us that under Rahmatullah Khan and Mirza Mohammad Hussain, the War Council took charge of Rajouri. Its General Council consisted of Mirza Faqir Mohammed himself, Major Ata Mohammed Khan, former member of J&K assembly, Mir Zaqataullah, former MLA , Subedar Major Sher Mohammed Khan, Chowdhry Dewan Ali Khan, Mirza Matiullah, Malik Nyamatullah Khan. The General Council insisted that the regions of Naushera, Rajal and Poni Parikh be reinforced by their men in order to consolidate the position of the Azad Kashmir forces. They trained young men to be sent to these places to resist the Indian forces. In the midst of

all these plans, Raja Sakhi Diler retreated to Kotli, his native place, with his companions, in spite of the pleas of the Azad Council that he should march on to Naushera and that his family would be looked after by the Azad rebels in his absence. But he was not amenable. Mirza Mohammad Hussain and Sardar Ibrahim Khan fell out over personal issues and this eventually undermined the movement for Azad Kashmir.

In the meantime, India launched Operation Rescue from Jammu on 13 November 1947, under the command of Brigadier Puran Jappi. He reached Beri Pattan on 15 November and captured Jhangar on 26 November. Arriving with his forces in Kotli on 26 November, his forces evacuated the refugees immediately, as it was not possible to hold Kotli with one Brigade operating from Beri Pattan to Kotli. Meanwhile, another Brigade under the command of Brigadier Mohammed Usman reached Naushera. But the invaders recaptured Jhangar on 27 December 1947, and Brig. Usman's forces were forced to retreat. He launched another initiative on 15 March 1948, reclaiming Jhangar while a Brigade under the command of Brigadier Yadunath Singh reached Naushera for the relief of Rajouri.

Once Jhangar was secured, the offensive to capture Rajouri was planned by General Kulwant Singh and

involved General Cariappa. On 8 April 1948, Brigadier Yadunath Singh advanced from Naushera through Barwali Hill with the Dogra forces. With the capture of Barwali, the road to Chingis lay open to tanks. Chingis was captured on 12 April 1948, and the same day Rajouri was reclaimed by the Indian forces. On 10 April, meanwhile, learning about the relentless advance of the Indian forces and their impending arrival in Chingis, Mirza Mohammed Hussain and Colonel Mohammed Aslam of the Azad forces left Rajouri for Juna with hundreds of raiders (*kabailis*). They had been confined to a camp in Gurdan because of the aforementioned rivalry between the former and the President of Azad Kashmir, Sardar Ibrahim Khan. They were then conveyed to Rawalpindi where an investigation was launched against them. They were arrested and Mohammed Aslam was discharged from his duties. Mirza Mohammed Hussain of Rajouri was not allowed to stay in Azad Kashmir and instead, was allotted an evacuee property in the area of Jhelum in Pakistan where he passed away in 1951.

Lala Pishori Lal Jhinjhotia's account of his stay in Rajouri during the occupation is a fascinating one and gives us a glimpse of both the traditional bonds that existed between the local Hindus and Muslims, as well as the hostilities that remained just below the surface of civil

behaviour. It pits the instincts of survival against all other instincts and is a tribute to human endurance and suffering, tolerance and compassion. Above all, it is an account of the capricious nature of human fortune which may tip the scales at any given time and alter the conditions of life. Its starkness demystifies for us the romanticism that is inevitably attached to the event in Rajouri's history as it passes through time into myth and legend. The massacre of women and children at the hands of their men become sacrifices, to commemorate which a Balidaan Bhawan is constructed. How else does one live with this terrible action and even more terrible choices? The women become *devis*, the men, Banda Veer Bairagis, martyrs upholding honour and faith. The truth is harsher as the negotiations of 8 November 1947 reveal. Pishori Lal's account reinforces that harshness.

After 14 August 1947, there had been large scale communal violence in the State, with the communities in a majority retaining the upper hand in their respective areas. In Rajouri, Hindus poured into town from the neighboring areas and the town's Muslims began to retreat into the villages and jungles. Lala Pishori Lal writes that the leaders of both communities in Rajouri proposed the setting up of a peace committee – Aman Committee. It was proposed that in the event of an attack, whether

by Muslims or Hindus, the citizens would jointly ward it off. Somehow this proposal was thwarted. Pishori Lal belonged to the RSS cadres who were in the forefront of the plan to defend Rajouri. He writes about the flimsy arrangements available. Only the local police station had five chests of ammunition. There was the 19 Unit, under the command of a Naik who had been deployed to guard the Treasury, to defend the entire *tehsil* of Rajouri. RSS had asked the police to release the ammunition to them but the SHO had declined. The RSS had tried in many clandestine ways to get ammunition into Rajouri from Jammu, even attempting to bring it in trucks carrying ration. But they were, for one reason or another, not successful. They also held back people who were planning to leave Rajouri for safer places like Jammu saying that such a move would deplete their strength and numbers. They were also confident that the Maharaja's forces would arrive to defend the *tehsil*. However, in spite of this many did leave under cover of darkness and there were others who were not persuaded by this argument. All this seems to suggest that people were not allowed to leave and were kept back in many cases, against their better judgement and indeed their will.

As an eye witness to the attack on Rajouri, Pishori Lal recounts how the situation was made more chaotic by

the Sanghis who could neither organize their people to defend the city nor to flee with their families. By the time the decision to leave was taken, the conditions were too dangerous to travel with women and children. It was too long and too arduous a journey for them to endure under the prevalent conditions. Pishori Lal says that Lala Narsingh Dass ji advised them against a last minute exodus in a procession. The decision was made for the collective. Individuals were free to leave as they saw fit. One of the most poignant description in Pishori Lal's narrative is that of the killing of the women. He talks of how women squabbled over the poison as children do for sweets on Diwali. When the poison ran out, the men got out their swords and axes, but these were in hands that had never been lifted to kill, and certainly not loved ones. Also, he says that many swords were blunt with disuse. He describes how he heard many women scream and moan after repeated gashes of blunt swords fell on their neck, and they were yet alive and their heads were still on their necks. He himself had lifted up a sword to kill his wife but had not been able to bring himself to do it. Many ran to the fields to save themselves and were hunted down and killed. Though many had escaped with their families, he describes how in the moment of choice, it was mostly every man for himself. He mentions how his brother thrust the small

children into his sisters' arms and fled into the countryside with him. From that moment of escape his story is a breathless account of a fugitive who sought refuge in the homes of the Muslim Gujjars who were regular visitors to Rajouri town for local merchandise. These were men with whom they had *len den ke samband,* the ties of give and take.

As wave upon wave of raiders and survivors fanned out into the countryside, people congregated in the *pucca* homes of affluent citizens began to kill themselves, consuming poison and jumping from terraces. Guns were also used. The chaos of the moment is captured in the confused narrative where we are not quite sure what happened after what. To cut a long story short, Pishori Lal and his brother, found shelter with locals. They were looked after and hidden from marauding mobs. They were disguised and guided to safe places. Information from the main centres traveling along the grapevine of the Muslim tillers and goatherds reached them and they learnt that the work of rehabilitating surviving Hindus was being carried out at Rajouri. They made their way to Rajouri to find many of their citizens alive, as well as many families who were reunited after the chaos of the raids.

Pishori Lal seems to hint that they were looked upon as converts to Islam. He is gifted a bound Quran when he finally leaves Rajouri, by Maulvi Inayatullah's son, which he reads. He mentions that in occupied Rajouri, they would go to the Maulvi' home to learn to read the Quran Sharif. The Maulvi also taught them to perform the *namaz* and recite the *qalma*. He talks of the moment when Mirza Mohammed Hussain, who had declared himself the *rajvada* of Azad Kashmir and was running a *durbar* from Nainsukh, Fatehpur on the outskirts of the town, sent them the order to move into a camp. He writes that they were referred to as *nav mussalmaan,* who are advised to go to the camp in Sidhyal because Rajouri faces the threat of bombardment by Indian forces and that it would be in the best interests of the people to do so. Even as the survivors receive this piece of news with skepticism, Lala Narsingh Dass and Durga Dass ji go to the Azad forces camp in Gurdan to consult rebel leader Aslam Khan about the wisdom of the move. Both are allegedly shot dead by Aslam Khan's bodyguards.

Pishori Lal's narrative must be mentioned because of the strangest coincidence. Babli came to be with me in December 2006 and we spoke about writing my memoir of Rajouri. Kailash's death and the stream of visitors, many from Rajouri, had refreshed my memories of the

place and our time together. I felt like meeting her again to tell her who all had come to condole her death. I always related my day in detail to her. It was a habit. I was grateful that even in her death she had made it possible for me to renew my ties with people who had lost touch with us over the years. Any way, sorting out my cupboard many documents emerged, which were testimony to Rajouri's political position and its devastation. I photocopied all those for Babli. Suddenly I recalled Pishori Lal' account of his stay in occupied Rajouri. I no longer had the book, having given it to my nephew to read. I called Pishori Lal who was in Jammu, on 6 January, 2007. He sounded disoriented and feeble. But he confirmed having copies of the book. I sent somebody and got it over the same day Babli was to leave for Delhi. She carried it with her. On 7 January 2007, Lala Pishori Lal passed away. Since all kinds of quirks have played such a huge part in my life, I think I am meant to include Pishori Lal's experience. Also because I am not an eye witness to all that happened in Rajouri, especially in the period of November 1947 to April 1948, I can only reconstruct that period from various accounts. Pishori Lal lived it and came out of it alive.

After the exodus from Rajouri, huddled in misery in refugee camps, we had sincerely believed that we would

never let Rajouri be forgotten, but few of us ever got down to writing down our experiences. Lala Pishori Lal ji did, though his printer did not do him justice. He saw the events from the point of view of the RSS cadres to which he belonged. He tells of the survivors of the carnage and the condition of Rajouri during the occupation. He also tells of the efforts that were made by the local citizenry to rehabilitate the citizens.

After the slaughter and the raids, Rajouri was a heap of unclaimed bodies. The surviving few tried to cremate them but they did not wait to see the corpses burn themselves out. One group of survivors fled a little ahead and hid themselves in a forest of banana trees near the river. There they distributed poison among themselves and committed suicide. Jiya lal Shah, my wife's Mama, had also tried to kill himself but his system rejected the poison and he vomited it out. Like some others he was mistaken for a corpse and survived the mobs which were on a rampage. Naushera was the destination of most of the survivors. Pishori Lal left only with his wife and infant daughter, fleeing along a jutting bank of the river under a hail of bullets. They hid in the thick sugarcane field next to the river. They opiated the baby so that she would not cry out.

Many men, women and children had hidden in the adjoining wheat fields. These were near the Muslim village of Kiladanidaar. Here the villagers were already engaged in loot and arson. They now came into the fields and set the harvest on fire so that the place would be lit up to reveal the hidden and the fleeing. Mayhem followed. People abandoned their women and small children and fled to places they felt would be safe. For this they relied on the bonds of shared community life which cut across religious lines. At the Muslim village of Dahassal a Muslim gathering recognized Pishori Lal and sheltered him along with other familiars. Pishori Lal and his brother also took refuge with Khairdeen Gujjar in his village and he protected them for days. At a *niyaz* offered by Ahmed Rafi Gujjar, the brothers went in disguise but were recognized by one who owed Pishori Lal one anna, and who thus paid a debt of gratitude by hosting the brothers in his home. There was a keen sense of fortune playing its part and none knew when the wheel would turn and the victor become the vanquished. Often the host family would be threatened and then the guest would be helped to flee, sometimes disguised as a Muslim, to safe places with names and addresses of trusted kinsmen. It was the Muslim Gujjars who brought in the news that the surviving Hindus were being rehabilitated in Rajouri town.

The survivors had been rounded up by Mirza Faqir Mohammed in Mandu's House, who was a Muslim and was not in town. Here, many families were reconciled and many who had separated during the riots were found, including Pishori Lal's family. Other vacant houses were identified and began to be allotted to families. Mirza Faqir Mohammed would come to enquire after them. Provisions were arranged for and distributed. The local Muslims and those from adjoining areas became part of a vast network of information about missing relatives and people. Pishori Lal confirms that Mirza Sahib was a well-wisher and a committed citizen of Rajouri.

Pishori Lal's account is full of the detailed catalogues of those who died and those who survived. He has even made the effort of keeping tabs on everybody in a period when separation of loved ones seemed to be the order of the day. He talks of the heroic efforts made by the ordinary people to track down abducted women and children, many of whom were sold in Kotli by the Pathans as domestic help. In this effort Mirza Faqir Mohammed helped to locate the abducted and made detailed lists of names of the missing persons and places to send to his contacts on the Indian side. He took the initiative and set up meetings in Lahore and used his friendship

with Sardar Ibrahim Khan, President of Azad Kashmir, to help the people of Rajouri. The CID was keeping an eye on the movements of people across the borders and often they were regarded as suspects but this informal track, apart from Smt. Mridula Sarabhai's efforts, was successful in recovering many women and children on both sides. Muslim women in Jammu were taken to Pakistan and the Rajouri-Kotli-Mirpur population was brought to Amritsar, Pathankot and Jammu to be reunited with their families.

III

Rajouri was attacked on the night of Diwali. Thousands of men and women were killed. I was in shock and restless for more information. Everything seemed unreal. At night I left Jagdish ji's House and went to my friend Bal Kishen's home. He had just arrived from Rajouri, managing to escape before the carnage and I was desperate for news. I heard some account of his own experience, I don't recall what, but he had also lost all he had, including his family. My father had been killed in Chingis and my beloved step-mother had consumed poison. Her young son, my stepbrother Rajneesh, was missing. My cousin Sushil's father had been caught by the Muslims and was ordered to convert to Islam He allegedly said that all his life his tongue had only pronounced Om, and that it would not say anything else. He was killed. My widowed aunt Dhanwanti, too had taken poison as had my sister Chander. Her husband had been killed. We were waiting to see who all had survived.

Bal Kishen had carried some opium just in case things became unbearable on the way out of Rajouri. Then he would take it as a poison. He still had it. Both of us

had lost the will to live. We were destitute and devastated. The opium seemed to be the solution to our condition. Both of us consumed it. The poison did not work as we had hoped and we began to vomit and survived. The next day with a heavy heart and head I went to Motyal ji. I had nothing to eat. I had no money. All my relatives were dead. My property was in the possession of the raiders. I had thought about trying to end my life that night. But I had not succeeded. Then something happened to change the direction of my life altogether.

After I had arrived at Motyal ji's house in the day, the toxin of the previous night had made me drowsy and I dropped off. I woke up in a haze to feel someone stroking my face. Opening my eyes I saw Kailash ji sitting by my bedside. She asked me why I had tried to kill myself. I told her that there was nothing in life to live for. Both of us set out for Jagdish ji's house. On the way Kailash pleaded with me to never make the mistake again of killing myself. I told her that if she became the support in my life, I would again consider living. She said that she was ready to become my support for life. I had not imagined that this would happen. All of a sudden my world changed. For eight years she had

been the companion I wished I had...she was mine at last in that moment! Now I did not need anything. Had the gods ordained this match? Alas! Why not before the raids?

Four days later, Chacha Dina Nath ji met us. He had left Jammu for a tour of Naushera on that fateful day of Diwali. He called me to his house and told me that Sushil and Raj had been able to get out of Rajouri and had arrived in Naushera and that he had brought them along to Jammu. I was grateful and assumed that he would also host them in these troubled times. But he wanted me to take them in. I told him that I myself was dependant on someone else's hospitality, and that it would be an imposition on them. I had nothing of my own. How could I thrust my young brothers on them? But he was insistent and finally I had to bring them back with me, to Jagdish ji's home where we had all been staying for a while now.

Jammu was becoming dangerous. Jagdish ji arranged for two military trucks to take us to Pathankot. Two days later we prepared to flee Jammu. Dr. Malik Ram Gupta insisted that we take Sushil and Raj along. So my brothers and I came away with them to Pathankot. We loaded

whatever we could carry into one truck and everyone got into the other one. I got into the truck loaded with everyone's belongings. By the time we reached Satwari, it had become bitterly cold. I had no warm clothes. Kailash ji took off her coat and made me wear it. Of course it did not fit but something kept me warm. We stayed at Pathankot for two months. Kailash and Mataji cooked for everyone in the most trying conditions. Then we moved to Amritsar where I got jaundice. But now I was afraid of nothing There was someone one to look after me, my health, my life! We stayed in Amritsar for twenty days. From there we all moved on to Delhi. We stayed at a hotel in Fatehpuri, Old Delhi, for four days.

Hearing the news of our arrival, Baij Nath Shivpuri came to take us to his government flat in Lodi Road. The Shivpuris had been our neighbours in Rajouri and great friends of Kailash's family. Baij Nath was like a brother to my future mother-in-law, and was therefore Mama to Kailash. His sister Tejen was Kailash's close, childhood friend. Shivpuri ji's father too had been killed in Rajouri but his mother was alive and staying with him. Bauaji was a typical matriarch and her word was law. She was a part of the community life of Rajouri. She understood the pain we all shared. The Shivpuris put

themselves out to make us comfortable. They lavished affection on us which made us forget our woes for a while. Tejen ji was also there and she and Kailash were delighted to be together again. Our days in Delhi were like those on an oasis after traveling in the desert. But we could not stay there indefinitely. Dr. Malik Ram who had relatives in Kanpur wanted to move us all there. I accompanied him to see if it would be possible for me to earn my livelihood there. In Kanpur, Doctor ji's sister's son-in law arranged for him to have a house and a shop on rent.

I returned to Delhi alone. I had traveled to and fro without a ticket. There was no money on me. On the train the thought crossed my mind, that if I could only have Rs. 25/- from somewhere, I could buy a text book of Economics and appear for the BA exam as a private candidate. I prayed to God for that amount. When I reached Delhi, there was a registered letter waiting for me. I went into the bathroom in trepidation and opened the letter there. Who knew what fresh disaster it had in store for me? But it was from my friend Bal Kishan who was in Allahabad at that time. He had sent me Rs. 25/-! He had written that he knew of my great financial crisis and he could well comprehend my

condition. He had been able to get a job and was sending me the money to help see me through a few days. I could not believe my luck. This could not be real. My prayer had been granted. I was beside myself with joy. I thanked God and went to the market and bought the book I wanted. I began to study. We stayed in Delhi for about six months. Then we left for Kanpur.

Time passed. In April 1948 the Indian army occupied Rajouri. My Nani and Mamaji's three surviving children, Veerbala, Shashi and Vijay were able to get out to Jammu. Dr. Malik Ram ji expressed anxiety about the uncertainty of their living conditions and suggested that I call them to Kanpur. I did that and they came to live with us. Along with them came Kailash's Nani, her uncle Jiya Lal Shah ji, Dr. Nanak Chand ji, Pimma, Guggi, Kamal, Satpal, Dharampal and some friends of Jiya Lal ji. All of them joined us in Kanpur. We lived in very trying circumstances but as one large family. Kailash and her mother took on the responsibility of running that large household in which there were along with adult men and women, also very small children. There were huge financial constraints and much physical work. But they managed somehow. Dr. Malik Ram Gupta was large-hearted and generous to a fault, and shared ungrudgingly what was his.

My brother Raj and I got jobs at Rs 40 and Rs 75 per month respectively, in the tractor department. Dr Malik Ram had been sustaining us by selling the family gold. It was only fair that once Raj and I started earning, we separate our kitchen. So we cooked and ate with my Nani and my relatives. The bread cooked was a mixture of wheat and maize in the ratio of 1:5, because maize was cheaper. Nani ji was the only one who could cook. Often she was unable to have a meal ready in time for us to get to work. We would then leave without eating in the morning and at lunch would eat roasted chick peas and puffed rice with water. After about eight months I had to leave Kanpur. I had to appear for my BA exam privately and had opted for Jammu as my centre. I had to quit my job. Again the responsibility of my relatives fell on Dr. Malik Ram Gupta.

In Jammu I had made arrangements to stay at the College hostel. D.N. Kotwal was there along with some other friends. I started studying for the exam but too much had happened in my life for me to muster the tranquility which is necessary to study. There were too many memories and an uncertain future loomed before me. I missed Kanpur, I missed Rajouri and I missed Kailash. I was too distracted and depressed. One day I threw

out my books and decided not to take the exam. I was distraught. Again fate intervened like a guiding hand. At that moment when my spirits had ebbed, a letter arrived from my friend Rajinder Shivpuri, who was also Baij Nath's youngest brother. His letter buoyed me up from the depths of despair. He reminded me of my obligations to the family name and of my responsibility to myself. He strongly felt that higher educational qualifications would open new paths for me. He understood how difficult it had been for me and still was, but he expressed faith in my abilities with words which restored my belief in myself. I was encouraged to reconsider my studies with a passion and I passed my BA exam. Many of my batch-mates who had been regular students failed. I can only be grateful to all those who lent me a hand during that time. Two of my friends did not accept any money for buying me meals for a month and a half, knowing that I was under severe financial strain. After passing the exam I got a job as a clerk in the Prince of Wales College at Rs. 40 a month. I served for three months. It was the same college where till my first year of BA, I had led a princely lifestyle.

One day I met a well-wisher of mine, a Dogra gentleman, who was a photographer by profession. We got talking

and he asked me what I really wanted to do. I did not have the luxury of choice but I did say to him that I wanted to return to Rajouri. He offered to find me a job and recommended me for a post of Enquiry Officer in the Supply department. I was appointed over many applicants including those with MA, and I was posted to Rajouri! I remember a certain Mr.Shanti Prakash, who was appointed Supply Officer at Rajouri was also posted there along with me. My salary was determined at Rs.75 a month and his at Rs 90. In addition, there was a boarder allowance of 50%. As part of my duty as Enquiry Officer, I loaded twenty trucks of wheat and left for Rajouri.

The trucks were to leave late. So I boarded a *tanga* to Akhnoor with my colleague Chunilal Fatehpuria. I had Rs. 20,000 on me to pay the freight charges for the trucks. On the way, between Jammu and Akhnoor, the *tanga* was accosted by a gang of four ruffians. We were forced to get off the *tanga* and made to stand at the edge of the road. They brought out some alcohol and forced it upon us. They even accompanied it with a snack of boiled *dal*. I refused to drink any of it. They walked us back to the main road. I was apprehensive that they would loot and kill us. Just then I spotted the supply

trucks coming. I hailed the first and the driver stopped. He gauged the situation immediately and came down with an iron rod. He began to beat up the goons, shouting at us all the while to get into the truck. We did that and he followed. We sped away. It was the quick wits of the driver that saved us from sure death.

I finally reached Rajouri. It was the first homecoming after the devastation of 1947. I was sick with apprehension. What would I see? Who would I meet? My heart beat fast. I found it difficult to swallow. The forlorn air in the worn-down town was like a blow in the stomach. I fainted in the *gali*. Chunilal ji who had accompanied me to Rajouri offered his vacant house to me and I started living there. I would eat my meals in the bazaar. Days passed before I could muster up the courage to see for myself my house and my Mama's home which I knew had been burnt down in the raids. When I finally went there...I cannot express in words what I felt.

Kailash's maternal uncle Jiya Lal Shah wrote me a letter saying that I should bring away my relatives from Kanpur. Why had I left them there? In whose care? Dr. Malik Ram ji had no clue about this letter. He would not have

permitted it. But it was the truth. I had been waiting to gather myself and settle down in this new Rajouri which I did not quite recognize. I sent my cousin Brij Mohan to Kanpur to bring my relatives back and all of us began to live in Rajouri. Soon we learnt that my step brother Rajneesh was in a refugee camp. We got him out of there and brought him to stay with us. When Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed became the Prime Minister of J&K in 1953, he announced that those who had left for the State for Pakistan in 1947, could come back if they so wished. Around that time I learnt that my niece Urmil and nephew, Lalit, my sister's children missing since 1947, were with a Muslim family and that they had all arrived in Mendhar. Within a few days an order was again passed by the Government to push the crowds back into Pakistan. I was anxious about the children going back with them. Main Ram was my connection to them and I tried to use the Army wireless to communicate to him that I would be coming to get the children. I persuaded two men to accompany me and in the month of December set out from Rajouri for Mendhar on foot. By then Bhimber Gali was inaccessible because of the snow. We went back. The next day we tried again and crossing the snow clad passes reached the top of Bhimber Gali. It was bitterly cold and the

effort had been exhausting. I lost consciousness. There was no way I could have come out of it alive but for the armymen who found me and nursed me back to life. The next day we made it on foot to Mendhar. I got the children along with the Muslim family back to Rajouri on horseback. The family was our guest in Rajouri for a week. We hosted them in the best tradition and when they were ready to leave gave them gifts in cash and kind. Urmil and Lalit began to stay with us.

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed also dedicated a small portion of land in the Ahta Tehsil of Rajouri to construct a memorial to the women who had sacrificed their lives in the collective ritual of *jauhar* there. A memorial stands there now and every year a commemorative meeting is held there around the date of the fall of Rajouri.

My salary was still Rs. 70 a month. It was difficult to survive on that. I requested Sushil's Mamaji to receive him in his care, but he refused. I asked Rajneesh's Nirmal Mamaji to take him away and that he could also have his share of the family property, but he too refused. I asked Shri Anant Ram Kaila who was the paternal uncle of Veerbala, Shashi and Vijay to give them shelter, but he refused advising me that I should put them away in

the camps since I too was without means. I requested Lalit and Urmil's Bimala Dadi and Raghubir Chacha to take them in, but he refused advising that they be sent away to the camps. But my heart said no to that. I felt that would mean the end of the road for these children, all of who came from good homes. The children continued to live with me even though I was a bachelor and there was no one at home to cook.

Mama Anant Ram was Mama Narsing Dass ji's cousin. After the latter's death he had apportioned two units of 182 canals each from the family property for his sons Vijay and Ratan who was still thought to be in Pakistan, though it was also rumored that he had died in the raids. Their house and shop was also with Anant Ram ji. Their land too brought in a substantial yield. I often wonder if that is why he agreed to take in Veer bala and Shashi along with their grandmother, my Nani. Naniji died after a short while but the girls remained with him till they got married and Vijay, their brother, stayed with me. Naniji had forbidden me to intervene in any property distribution, so I do not know in what way these children received their share of the family property. As time went by, all these children plunged into the task of carving out their futures. They got jobs, they married and today

much to our joy, are all well-settled. That all of them turned out to be good and were respectful to us was a boon. What more could we have wanted?

In Rajouri, the DC posted me as Store keeper instead of Enquiry Officer. I met an overseer named Sukh Ram. We became friends and moved in together into a room in Sushil's ancestral home. From there we shifted to my Mamaji's vacant house. Sukh Ram brought his family to that house. His wife, sister Shanta, and his mother lived with us till 1951. We had a good time. I became a brother to Shanta. She would tie me *rakhi* and put *tika*. I began to receive rice and maize from my land. We lived without want. Around that time there was a lottery announced from Calcutta. Sukh Ram, his wife and I put in Rs. 2 each to buy six tickets, and made a pact that whoever won would share half of the winnings with the other party. Sukh Ram's wife won on her ticket! Out of her winnings of Rs. 3000, she gave me Rs. 1500.

It was unbelievable! Fifteen hundred rupees was a lot of money. I suddenly felt that a world of opportunity had opened up. I made up my mind to study law. Kailash too was all for it. In the July of 1951, I went off to Aligarh. I joined the M.A. and the Bachelor of Law course there,

planning to complete them simultaneously. It was possible to pursue both in those days. My college friend Dina Nath Kotwal, also joined Aligarh University. There I also met Satya Bhushan who was the son of Lala Roop Lal, and his room in the hostel was next to mine. Irfan Habib who went on to become a great historian, was my classmate. It amuses me now to recall that in one of the history exams I had scored more than him! I cleared my final exam in 1953. I recall that I would study 17 to 18 hours a day. I knew that I could not afford to fail. I had no money to sustain myself there for a third year. My family had grown. There were nine young children for whom I felt morally responsible. They were in my charge.

How could I still offer marriage to Kailash? There were misgivings all around. I was no longer the sole survivor of a respected family. Kailash was the only child of Dr. Malik Ram. She was intelligent and educated. She was doing her M.A. And she considered herself betrothed to me. In 1954, Kailash and I were married in Jammu. She was a beautiful bride and wore flowers as her bridal ornaments. She came into my considerably large house-hold with its formidable responsibilities. Looking back I can only admire the way in which she managed the large family and put up with every hardship. Knowing

my financial condition she never demanded anything for herself of the kind that women are known to want...no jewellery, no fancy clothes, no extravagances. She sacrificed the prospects of making a career for herself as a lecturer and dedicated herself to the management of the family.

When I look back I think with gratitude of the many people, friends and mere acquaintances who appeared in my life at crucial junctures to help me. This is not just coincidence but my good fortune. I remember Sushila Bua who helped us during her lifetime and stood by us in our darkest hour. How can I forget the services rendered by Amar Singh who came to us in 1966 and stayed with me throughout my married life? He was a process server in the courts in Kathua. He made his home with us. After his official duties he would serve us in the house. He was an exceptionally talented cook. He became a member of the family, privy to all its secrets, its custom and ways, and shouldering its responsibilities. He continued to stay with us after my retirement for 22 years, till his own in September of 2005. We are indebted to him and I draw great satisfaction from the fact that his son too got appointed as process server in the courts in Jammu.

Back in Jammu with my qualifications, I was selected Naib Tehsildar. My wife did not let me join at that level saying that it would take a long time to become a gazetted officer. I had also applied for the post of Munsif and was finally selected with some efforts. On 5 December 1955, I joined as a government prosecutor in Rajouri. There I heard that Sushil's missing sister, my cousin Sarla, was apparently in the household of a Muslim from Rajouri settled in Azad Kashmir. I started seeking his whereabouts and identity. Once these were known, I began corresponding with him. People used their good offices and arranged to have Sarla handed over at the Jhangar border in Azad Kashmir. But there were demands for cash, clothes and edibles. I arranged the needful. Sushil was studying to be a pilot in Kanpur. He was called over. I was also ready to accompany him.

It was 1955. I was in Jammu and my wife was expecting our first child. She was not well and pleaded with me not to leave her because the baby could come anytime. I retorted that I would certainly go. Receiving my sister was more important than the baby's arrival. She was in tears. I relented. Finally, Mama Jiya Lal ji accompanied Sushil. They had just left when the delivery pains began and our son Rakesh was born. Though I thanked God

that I had not gone with Sushil, I had fought with her saying that I would certainly go to collect my sister, and that the baby would arrive regardless. Now, when I think about that confrontation my heart is oppressed. We were in a rented house in Jammu. When our son turned a month, we got Sarla engaged. We then returned to Rajouri.

On 17 April 1958, another son Kanti was born to us. We were in Mohalla Dalpatian in Jammu and he was delivered by a mid wife, under the care of his grand-father, Dr. Malik Ram. My father-in-law was an extraordinary man. Compassionate and gifted as a healer, dutiful as a son and brother. He was a large man but very gentle in his manner to all. Everyone who came in contact with him could count on him. On transfers to remote areas, he would stand at the bus terminus and receive the last bus to see if anyone he knew was looking for shelter and a home cooked meal. He would then invite them to his home before sending them on their way. He cared for me and my surviving family like his own, often selling his own possessions to raise money to look after all of us in those dark days after the devastation of Rajouri and adjoining areas. He loved animals and cared for the strays that always made their

home wherever he was. My wife inherited this love of animals from him. He adored his only child Kailash and her children. She in turn never quite got over his death. He died in October 1977. She was heartbroken and heartsick. She missed him throughout the rest of her life reminiscing about him and mourning him.

Dr. Malik Ram Gupta was a well-loved and respected figure in Rajouri, where he had married. In 1947, after most relatives were dead and those who remained were destitute, there were some who survived from his wife's family. All of us entered a very novel and difficult phase of our lives where it was difficult to get even a square meal a day. At that juncture Dr.Malik Ram stood by us. In Kanpur, he sold bit by bit, the remains of what he had been able to get when he had fled, some money and a little jewellery. The money was used to feed and care for about twenty people living with him. The hard times passed. All of us began the effort to rebuild our lives and finally were able to stand on our feet. Some did very well for themselves. But the bonds of affection and consideration that had held us together were somehow broken. Perhaps it was the intoxication of new money, to acquire which every illegitimate means was used. People became rich overnight. And blind too. They

saw themselves as free of all obligation and gratitude. There were unpleasant confrontations which the sensitive Dr. Malik Ram just could not take. He had only a daughter. He retired at a pension of Rs. 200. He was the one to truly live the life of a refugee. The condition in which he passed his last years, in spite of being surrounded by those he had nurtured through terrible times, is something that will stay with me till I die.

I travelled all over the State on various assignments. I worked as Munsif in Samba, from there to Akhnoor, Ramban and then to Jammu. In Jammu I was promoted as sub-judge and posted to Leh/Kargil in 1965. While in Leh, one day I received the news that my step- brother Rajneesh had run away from home. My wife was distraught with worry. I was angry at my brother for putting her through all this. I was also worried sick. I was responsible for these children left in my care by fate. But I reassured her that we had done enough, and that he was an adult and in a position to decide what was good for him. We should not worry. But she was not to be calmed. She wanted me to go looking for him. I knew I would have to get to Jammu urgently. It was winter. The overland routes were closed. To get to Jammu I would first have to get to Srinagar. There was no

transport out of Leh across the Zojila Pass. The only way was to cross on foot and take the army's help on the other side. I set out to do just that. When I finally reached Srinagar, my colleagues could not believe I had come out of Leh in that weather and had crossed the Zojila on foot.

From Leh I was transferred to Kathua. It was an eventful stay. My father-in law was staying in Jammu. One night there was a burglary in his house. As luck would have it, the little ornaments left to him as well as some that we had kept in his custody, were all robbed. While we were still in Kathua Rajneesh came back home to us. He was finally recovered from Bombay where he had run off to seek his fortune. Lalit, older, mature and steady, who had gone there brought him back. He found him destitute, sleeping in empty railway coaches. My wife told Rajneesh to go back to Rajouri and rework his life, which he did. He started a small business there. He got married and today is doing very well for himself. It was from my home in Kathua in 1966, that Sushil got married. I was delirious with joy at his marriage. His bride was my wife's cousin. It was a cementing of ties that meant a lot to me. I played the role of the bridegroom's father.

Rajeev, the last of our children, was born to us on 25 March 1967. We had wanted a daughter. Even today a daughter is closer to her parents than sons, but we thank God for him. As the youngest he always lived with us. After my wife's death in November 2006, he and his wife Mona, have looked after me with a rare devotion and caring. His sons though very young, try to cheer me up. I am thankful for their presence. In 1968, I was transferred to Jammu as a mobile magistrate, a post I retained for three years. Then I became the Deputy Registrar in the High Court. I was promoted as Sessions Judge and posted to Poonch. I stayed there for a while and in December 1971, I came back to Jammu as an additional Sessions Judge. I was transferred out on various postings to Kathua, Udhampur and so on, touching base in Jammu every once in a while where my family lived. Five years before my retirement in 1978, I was posted back to Jammu as Chairman Debt Reconciliation Board and vested with the additional powers of Financial Commissioner and Deputy Custodian General.

I retired on 28 February 1983, at the age of fifty-five. My two elder sons Rakesh and Kanti were already married. I had no great responsibilities I wanted to pass

my time without stress and I decided not to go into practice. Tirath Singh, currently Judge, High Court of Delhi, son of Shri DD Thakkar had a roaring practice. He made me the offer to join him. I thanked him and refused. In 1989 I was appointed the Chairman of the Consumer Forum for four years and the term was over in 1993.

Throughout my working life I was helped and supported greatly by Lala Harbans Lal Bhagotra. I can never forget that. After retiring, people involved me in litigations but he continued to help and advise me at every step. Kirpa Ram was a servant in the ancestral home. His wife died in the riots of 1947. When I went back to Rajouri after the raids, I arranged for him to stay on the *mandir* lands, built him a room, allotted two shops which gave him rent, and from the *mandir's* property gave three *kanals* of land which he could work and enjoy the yield. Later, he remarried and a daughter was born to him. Upon his death I got her married and did the *kanyadaan*. My children respected this relationship. In 1982 suddenly, Kirpa's daughter and son-in –law claimed ownership of the land and shops and filed a suit in court. I was drawn into a litigation to save the property of the *mandir,* the first of many to follow.

In 1996, Rajeev too got married. He has two sons by the grace of God. They live with me so I'm very attached to them and they are balm to my old eyes. The plot of land on which my house stands was allotted to me on the recommendation of Shri Behari Lal Suri. Suri ji is no more but we will always remember this favour he did us. The house has two floors and the upper one is rented out. Whatever comes in is enough for us to live comfortably. We don't have to ask for anything from anyone. My eldest son constructed his own house in 1999 and began to live separately with his family.

Now we do not possess any property in Rajouri. Maybe it is the result of some *muni-rishi's* curse. At one time we had land worth lakhs, now we have nothing there. And we were exiled. These thoughts did come to me intermittently. Even so I was living a good life with my life partner. In the year 2000 my wife fell ill. We tried many treatments but all were to no avail. Then Dr. N.S. Pathania diagnosed her for Giant Cell Arteritis, a rare auto-immune disease and she was put on steroids till she went into remission. She was never her old self again. One night she became so sick that I thought that was the end. But God was kind to me. In 2002, my mother-

in-law who lived with us, passed away. My wife grieved for her. She was her only link to her natal home. She was very low. We decided to go to Prayagraj with Pandit Devraj and his family and spend the entire month of Magha in Allahabad.

In spite of her fragile health and her distaste and intolerance for cold, my wife would go at dawn every day for a dip in the holy confluence. She would perform *havans* and complete her *pooja-path* with reverence. She would give away in charity whatever she could. We also went to Jagannath Puri on that trip. Pandit Devraj, his wife and mother took us in their charge from the very start of the *yatra*. We can only express our indebtedness and can never forget the way in which they looked after us. My wife, till the very end, spoke about them in tones of gratitude and affection. Before this, the only time I had gone on a pilgrimage had been with Mamaji in 1945, to Katas in Pakistan. I had seen the Khevra Mines there. They were salt mines. One Mukund Lal ji had also accompanied us. While returning from there, as he stood in a queue to get our railway tickets, someone had pulled off his *dhoti*. His response had been to thank God that he had had his underwear on!

When Kailash's condition would aggravate, her dosages would have to be varied accordingly. Her arteries were swollen up. Here I was a diabetic of 38 years. I had a heart condition too. I got on to insulin in June 2006. On 15 August my blood sugar dipped dangerously and I blacked out. I could have died and perhaps it was my wife's prayers that saved me. For, she was to breathe her last in my arms. From June to October it was happy times for us. My wife celebrated the fourth year of her mother's passing away, an event that signifies the severing of all earthly ties by the departed one. We were both ailing but had each other for company. My wife's devotion to the Divine had touched new heights in the past year. She would catch all the religious programmes on TV every day for hours. She would worship the *tulsi*. Her *pooja* would last hours. She would be in the bathroom for two to three hours, perhaps cleaning the wash basin and maybe in that too she was worshipping. Maybe she was convinced that she had little time on earth.

As I learnt later, she was aware of an astrological prediction that Kanti would be motherless at 48 years of age. She had become distant from me too. At 5.30 in the morning she would go to the kitchen and churn

the cream for butter. Then she would switch on the TV for devotional programmes. At 7.15, on Sanskar Channel there would be an unveiling of Krishna's idol. Each day she would fold her hands before it for 5 minutes, stopping all her chores. This was the set pattern of her life. And then, on 25 November 2006, she got up in the morning and went about her chores as everyday. I came back from my walk. She made tea for both of us. She made me breakfast and at around 9.30 went into the bathroom. At around 10.15 as I got up to go out in the sun on the lawns, my wife opened the bathroom door and barely managed to step out. Her eyes had rolled back and she was pallid. She was holding on to the door. I moved and held her and laid her out on the floor. I screamed out for Raju and Mona who were out on the lawn. They rushed in and put her on the bed. Someone ran across to call the doctor. Mona phoned Rakesh who was in the clinic, to ask him to come immediately. I was so stupefied that I could not lay her out on the floor, light the last lamp and get her to perform her last act of *daan*. I will regret that for the rest of my life. I was so shocked that I did not put her head in my lap as she breathed her last. And within minutes, even as we watched, she passed away.

I am in such shock that fifty days have passed and I just can't pull myself together. I can't sleep night and the days don't seem to pass. Both of us would not have gone together, could not have done so. But women are supposed to be eight times more tolerant than men. In spite of this even for them it is difficult to pass time without their spouse. I am so stricken that I can not sleep for hours at night. And the days just do not pass. Everyone goes about doing their work and I just sit by myself, numb with pain. I had not needed to practice law but when I hear how well lawyers are doing and how busy they are, I begin to wonder whether I had taken the right decision in not entering into practice. Kailash's sudden death has dealt such a blow to me that I find it insufferable.

I had not wanted to live on. After the *uthala* I had felt that it was better for me to die. I had no poison with me. But yes, I had a bottle of whisky on me. I could drink it all up at once and die. Then the thought struck me that my death would not ensure that I would meet Kailash. I had a change of heart and am now waiting for my turn. Let me see where God takes me and what he reveals. But I am like the living dead. She was not merely a wife to me. She was much more. She had

taken care and brought up my little brothers and sisters and had really worked towards making me a life. In these last few lines I want to say how I had done *tapasya* to get her, did not value her when I did, and how I lost her to disease and an ailing heart.

The first time I set eyes on Kailash was when she was nine years old. I was twelve and had gone out of Rajouri for the first time to Mirpur with my Sushila Bua. After a week, her brother Amar Chacha ji, accompanied me on the journey back to Rajouri. When we got off at the Khoi Hatha bus stop, we found Dr. Malik Ram Gupta standing there. He was posted there and took us away to his house to spend the night. Around 9 at night, Kailash, who was already a beauty, helped her mother to prepare dinner. She was in high spirits. After some months the good doctor was transferred to Bunji, on the Gilgit route. On their way there, Doctor ji and his family stopped in Rajouri and my Mamiji, who was Kailash's mother's friend, went to bid her farewell at night. I wanted to catch a glimpse of Kailash again so I too accompanied her holding up her lamp to light the way. Once Kailash and her parents were gone, letters to my Mami would come from Bunji and I too would read those letters feeling a kind of nameless joy, nothing else.

Three years later Doctor ji was transferred to Rajouri. They passed through Jammu, where they stopped at Dina Nath Mahajan's House. I was in my first year of college in Jammu. I went to meet them and went all the way to the railway station from where they were going to Mirpur and then on to Rajouri. Kailash was knitting a sweater and I wished she would knit me one too. But I stopped myself from saying that to her. I went to Rajouri during my vacations. I would visit the Doctor and see Kailash. Soon the thought crossed my mind that I should try and break off my engagement to Kuntal and propose to Kailash. With this in mind I went to Master Sant Ram and Mama Dina Nath Kaila. The latter's wife was very encouraging and promised to help me.

During the summer vacation I would often stand in the yard of my house and watch Kailash go to visit her maternal grandparents. One day Mamiji saw me standing in the sun and ribbed me saying that the one I was waiting for had taken another route, and it was futile for me to wait in the sun. I told Mami of my heart's desire and she supported me. She went off to speak to Kailash's mother. But her mother responded saying that the boy is already engaged, and that could proceed in the matter only if the previous engagement broke off.

I have already mentioned how unthinkable that was. There was a close-knit kinship network. People could not afford to offend relatives by transgressions such as this. My family certainly did not think that anthing could be done in a hurry. On that note, once the vacations were over I went back to Jammu for my studies. Conditions in Rajouri were worsening and Kailash came to Jammu with her mother. I have already related how events unfolded thereafter.

After Kailash's death I'm trying to read a bit of the scriptures that she read so regularly. She was an avid reader of literature especially in Hindi and Bengali. During our stay in Kanpur she had had Bengali friends and had also learnt a bit of the language. She was so clued in to reading and general awareness that she won the first crossword puzzle that **Dharmayug**, the Hindi magazine had offered to readers in 1951 or 52, I think. The prize money was Rs.3000/-. She won it along with a friend and they shared the prize. Her own winnings she turned over to her father to use in those trying times. During her last years of her life, apart from watching scriptural programmes on TV she read a lot. She would always ask Kanti and Babli to get her books from Delhi. She had a fairly large collection. I have read

somewhere that a wife devoted to her husband gets him back in her next birth. In my eldest son's *kundali* as revealed by the **Bhrigu Samhita**, he has been born to the same set of parents he had in his previous life. I had forgotten about this little detail but I wonder what the sages have to say about this. First, Kailash will be received by god and judged for her devotion to her husband? Then she may be reborn and in another life will become my wife? How am I to recognize her as the wife of a previous birth? All these questions crowd in my mind and I feel reality slip into dreams. The scriptures have written about life and death in a way that someone like me is bewildered. What is this maze? The truth is that I can only hold on to the fact that we were married in this life and the afterlife holds no guarantees. Why should we meet again, if we are to have no memory of a previous life together? The information in Rakesh's *kundali* did not rekindle any memories, nor did we get any signals of a previous togetherness. All these things are beyond the ken of human beings. So do good, think of God and don't harm others.

After death the soul is peaceful that's all. I am a sinner. I don't know what is in store for me. What is the reason I am alive? Only time will tell. Death will come. It will

bring a flurry of activity for the rest of the family. There are expenses involved. Before 1947, our family Guru was Baba Dutadhaari of Hardwar. In his lifetime I sought solace in his presence. However, I don't want my *asthis* taken to Hardwar after my death. Instead, they should be taken to Rajouri and immersed in the Tawi which flows on the Nabun side, where Baba Jatadhaari's cottage stands. I bathed here in my childhood. And just by it is the Baidka Maidaan, where we got together as friends and played ball, *kabaddi, gulli danda,* and wrestled. If I have any savings left, then a room with a kitchenette and toilet should be built on top of the room occupied by Devraj's mother. He knows the place. And so does his son Laxmi Narayan. The access should be along Hira Lal's shop. I have never given anything to the Mandir. I will try to build the room in my lifetime itself. If there is no money left, it is alright. I will ask God for forgiveness. Except for this room, I do not desire any other kind of *daan* or ritual after my death.

There are actually two temples. Shri Laxmi Narayan mandir and Shri Raghunath mandir and a Yatri Niwas attached to them. In my mind they are one entity - Mandir. I have served the Mandir in my lifetime. In the raids of 1947, the *murtis* were destroyed. In 1961, I

installed new *murtis* in the Mandir with all due religious rites. Pandit Rameshwar Dutt Raina of Akhnoor performed all the rituals. He and his sons have been helpful and supportive in so many ways and we have received immense love and affection from them. I am very grateful for that. At the time of the installation of the *murtis* Pt. Raina told Kailash that in the moment of the first *darshan* after the unveiling, any wish she made would be granted. At the appointed time Kailash stood before the *murtis* for five minutes and prayed with folded hands. Later I asked her what she had asked for. She replied that she had prayed that the *murtis* should stand there for all time to come . Nothing else.

The Mandir's income has risen from Rs 200 a month to Rs.12000 a month, as a result of my efforts. Its property has doubled. The Trust at present has cash in hand amounting to Rs. 75 lakhs in the form of FDRs in nationalized banks located in Rajouri and Jammu in accounts in the names of both the *mandirs*, Yatri Bhawan and the Dharmashala Arjun Shah. The Manager of the Trust along with the members will decide how the money is to be spent on the development of the Mandir and the Yatri Niwas. After my retirement I have faced much *litigation* on account of the Mandir. In a strange way

I have identified the Mandir as the family I have lost. My ancestors and elders speak to me from there and I sense their presence within its precincts. It has been crucial for me to keep the Mandir protected, maintain its sanctity, allow it to flourish and give succour to all who have sought shelter there for different reasons. I hope and trust that the *mohatmim* from the Saraf family will always look after and manage the Trust created by Lala Mohan Lal Saraf, properly and honestly and to the best of his abilities to perpetuate the memory of my ancestors.

Kailash used to go to Rajouri almost every year till her death to make the arrangements for the celebration of Krishna Janamashthami in the Laxmi Narayan Mandir just as Smt. Hira Devi, the widow of Lala Mohan Lal Saraf used to do.

In a strange way I am indebted to Kailash even in death that she has inspired me in her absence to turn my thoughts to the Divine. I spend almost two hours a day in *pooja-paath*. A wife is doubtless a tremendous support in life. In her life she was my strength and I could face up to anything, all obstacles and troubles. Now in her death, I see myself only pass time.

Today is the first of Magha. A very enlightened man has advised me to read the **Bhagwat Puran**. My wife had wanted that reading to be organized in Rajouri, but that wish was left unfulfilled. I am going to try and read it. I read 150 pages today and I like it. Babli has always wanted to write about Rajouri. I have given her a lot of material. If she gets to write my story on Rajouri, I would like to suggest a title for it - *Rajouri Ki Kahani Amar Ki Zabani*. I would like a Hindi and an English version and I would like to distribute it to everyone I know. I always used to remark to her that it must be some bond in a previous birth that brought her from Bengal into a household from Rajouri, as my son's wife. Perhaps she came to tell my story and the story of Rajouri.

In the days after the Partition, in my hopelessness and desperation I had clutched at all straws. I had gone to Hoshiarpur to retrieve my *kundali* at the **Bhrigu Samhita** to get some idea of what life held in store, and to find a guiding factor which could give it direction. In my *kundali* designed by Bhrigu rishi, it was written that this subject would face great devastation at the age of 18-19 years. There was a reason for this. In some previous *birth a sadhu* had left some money in his custody and

gone on a pilgrimage. On his return he had asked for his money back, but the man had denied having the money at all. For this sin the *sadhu* cursed him saying that he would lose all he had in every birth and that he would never enjoy anything from his ancestors. In this birth, the *sadhu* had been born as my father. In my son Rakesh's case the *kundali* had mentioned that he had been born to the parents of his previous birth. We had lived in a small region in the Himgiri and I had been *wazir* to the king there. Rakesh too had been well placed in the king's court. But the two of us had conspired and killed the king and taken over his kingdom. Thus, in every birth we would have to suffer the consequences.

Well, I did lose everything. I saw poverty and turmoil. I was nine, when my father in my presence had hidden away gold ornaments in an underground strong-room in our Rajouri home. I had stood and watched, holding up a lamp in my hand for light. My father had thought that if he were no more, I would at least know where the gold was hidden. But the curse had worked. I did not have the slightest memory of many things after the raids of 1947. The half-burnt shop made out on the ground floor of my ancestral house was rented out to

a tea vendor. Since the place was in disrepair, he asked my permission to redo the floor, which I readily granted. He made the new cemented floor and the next thing I knew was that he had bought a lot of property. It came to me only then, in a flash, that he had found the buried gold. I relived that boyhood scene with a sense of hopelessness. In the same way, in the Saraf mansion there had been a room which had my aunt Hira Devi's lock on the door. There was a large steel cupboard there. I had forgotten about that too and someone else appropriated it before I could get to it. All this I am sure, was the working of the curse.

In retrospect, it is eerie to see how the curse worked realizing its design. Not only had I lost everyone and everything I held dear, in 1950, the laws on land ceiling came into effect in J&K, as the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act. Many important people, especially the politically connected, saved their land by showing them as orchards- *bagh,* which were exempted by the Act. Unlike other places in the rest of the country, where compensation for land acquisition by the State was computed at market rates, here no compensation was given to owners. Ownership itself was cast into doubt because there were tillers on the land, and there was

no provision to get the land vacated. As a result there were no buyers either. I lost 8000-9000 kanals of land, almost all I had. Only 182 kanals were left with me. Had I finally evaded destiny? Was the curse over? In 1976, the remaining land too was acquired at nominal compensation, almost one-fourth the worth. I had sinned in some previous birth. Else my wife too would not have suffered thus. She lived all her life layered by a fine dust of poverty.

I feel very guilty. Kailash must have had her dreams and desires. We lived a simple life. My salary was meagre. I began my work at Rs 40 a month, and retired on Rs 2500 a month. She was aware of all this. She never made any demands on me. But I realize that I too had some duty towards her. Once she became mine, I became careless of what I had. Today when I recall those things, I can only have regrets. If she had not given me such solace why would I miss her so much today? I got the opportunity to spend my life with her... but I did not take advantage of that. I never thought that one of us would die before the other...that death would come at all! What then would be the condition of the one left to mourn? I am overcome with thoughts of her. I too want to die. My aloneness drives me mad.

Kailash was always mindful that she was an only child, that she had no brother or sister. She always said that it was a curse to be born as an only child, and a daughter at that. Her death brought it home to me that she was truly alone. There was no one to really mourn her passing away, except me and my family. When I think of the respect and affection that her parents commanded in Rajouri and Mirpur, the sacrifices that they had made for their relatives and chance acquaintances during the dark years after Partition, I am struck by the indifference that her own kin has shown towards her. It has made me very bitter to see how her near and dear ones have submitted to being manipulated by outsiders.

I am equally thankful to all the people who have given me solace in these dark months. My childhood friend, Rajinder Shivpuri and his sister Tejen ji, who was also Kailash's friend, have called and spoken to me for hours consoling me and reliving past memories. My brothers-in –law, Yash ji and Ram Prakash ji, who have been voices of wisdom and have guided me when I was blind with grief. Chowdhry Harbans Lal Advocate, a widower himself, who cheered me up saying how it was fortunate that we men were around to safely see our wives through

with care and love. God only knows how they would have fared without us. Dr. Sansar Chand from Chandigarh would ring up to reassure me and invite me to spend time with him. He has stepped in to offer his counsel at so many difficult moments that I can't thank him enough. Late Pandit Ved Vyas ji and his family have offered succour time and again. And yet....

Every day Nitya, our little grandson asks me when his Dadi will come back. Everyday I say - tomorrow. His question leaves me restless and sorrowful because she will never come back, not even in a thousand births. Life carries on for all. No one really cares that there was a Kailash who lived in this world. One can't get death for the asking. Else what is left for me in life? I have thought about this and suddenly I find that actually, now I want to live. Because it is only in this life that I can gaze on her likeness, her framed photo, recall her in memories sweet and bitter, and even meet her in my dreams. My dying will take away all that.

I must finish now. The **Bhagwat Purana** which I had begun on 14 January was completed on 31 January 2006. Reading it has changed my life in small ways. I could have never have fathomed that separation would

bring such sorrow and pain. It would have been better to die first. The **Bhagwat** says that we should call on Sri Krishna continually...this makes for a peaceful death...the next birth is then blessed. But no one assures me that one will get the same spouse or relatives. Nor can we ascertain that in the next birth we will be reborn as humans... I do hope I meet her again though. And that she is my wife once more. I want to tell her a hundred things. I want to make up to her for the innumerable lapses I committed. I want to thank her. I want to ask her forgiveness. We spent fifty -two years of marriage together but I did not really speak to her of the most important things. I never thought that one of us would die... Kailash had worshipped Krishna and till her last breath called out to him. The Lord must have granted her a place at his feet. She was a good woman and wife and when I die, she will ensure that I too get a place at the Lord's feet. This is written in the **Bhagwat.**

But the truth is that we meet here - in this life. That we will meet again, somewhere... sometime... is a false reassurance. Even after lakhs of rebirths there will be no such reunion, and even if there were to be, there would be no recognition.